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Adventure

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NOVEMBER 1st ISSUE, 1930
VOL. LXXVI No. 4 W

ADVENTURE

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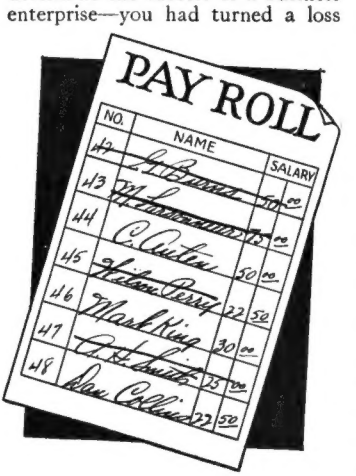

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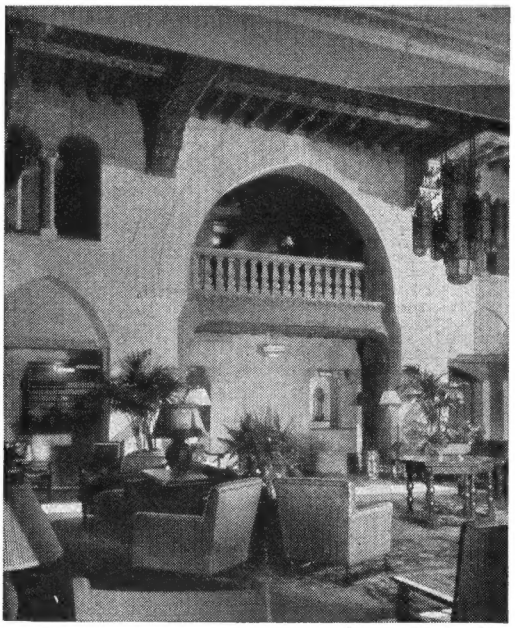

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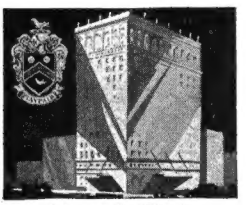

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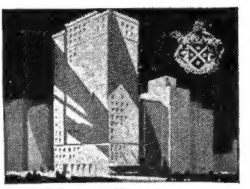

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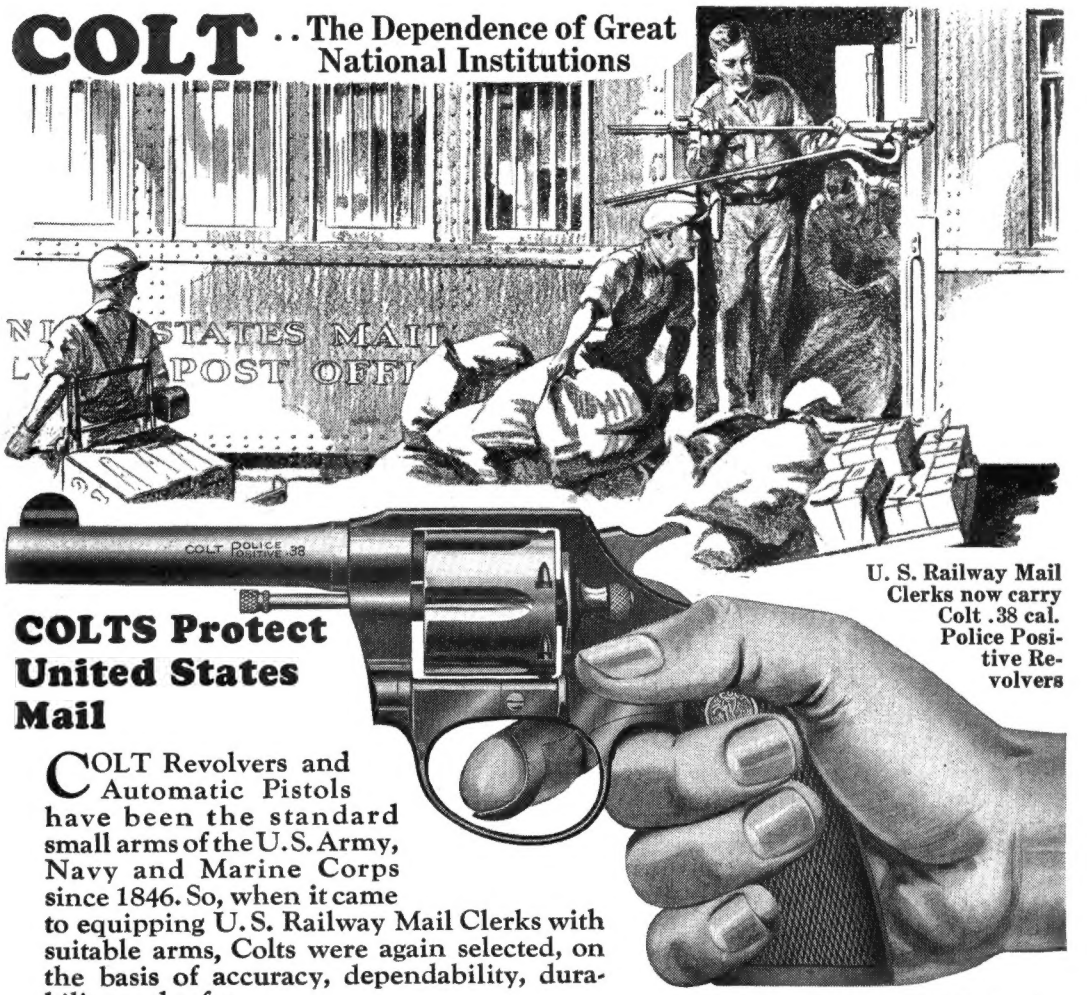

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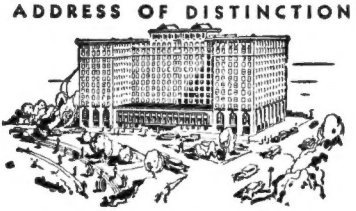

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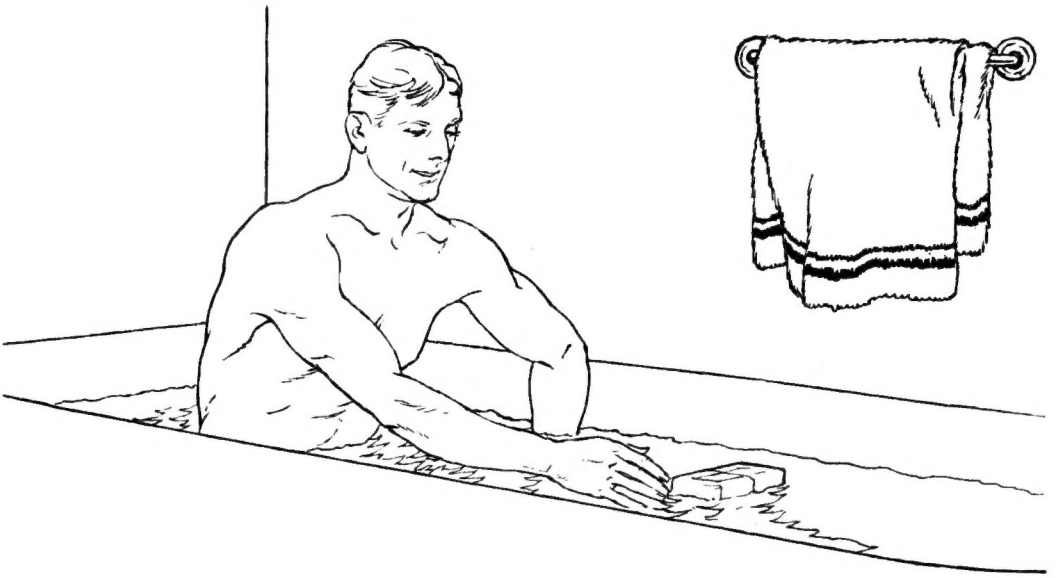

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A SLUG AT DESTINY

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

THE THREE of us were in Jack's Bar when Laverne walked in. There was not much to be said for any of the three, myself included. Halvers was a Limey, a little, red headed, cowardly rat who used bold words to hide behind; Limey stood for Limehouse in his case, but he had stuck with us when we jumped the *Anna Nelson*.

Freed was a big boned, laughing, blond devil with a broken nose and a bullying way, and pleasant enough if he got it. He hailed originally from Iowa, and what came between Iowa and Port Austin was a long story and most of it drunken and dissolute. It was Freed who had smashed the mate's head with a firebar when we swam ashore from the *Anna Nelson*. I was the third, John Irwin to wit; and when Laverne walked into Jack's Bar I was just as drunk as the other two and that much more of a fool, since I knew better.

Laverne walked in—we did not know then who he was, though every one else in the place did—and looked around. He looked at us and we at him. He was wide shouldered, and the chest at his open shirt front was a mat of curly black hair; his head was cropped, and under his faded billycock hat was a face to remember—big nosed, square jawed, blue eyes and black lashes, a look on him that struck out at you. A bad man he was from all standards, but he was no liar.

Port Austin, with the Arafura Sea on

A Novelette of the South Seas

one side and Australia over the southern horizon, is the convenient name I'm using for another place altogether. You may recognize the place, but we'll let it go at that; I have no wish to be hauled back for what happened then and later.

Laverne walked up to us where we stood at one end of the bar. We did not have his name then, of course, nor did we have his right name until sometime later; but every one else in the place knew who he was. His gaze flicked over Halvers, touched lightly upon Freed and came to rest on me, to whom he addressed his blunt words.

"So you're the three who jumped the *Anna Nelson* last night, eh?" he said. His voice was resonant, calmly restrained and mild; yet it gained instant attention.

"What's it to you?" I asked.

"A good deal," he returned easily. All the others around were watching us and listening, but little he cared. "Aye, a good deal. Her mate's dead, and it's a hanging job, and they're putting the police after you this minute."

At this Halvers whined an oath. Freed laughed and swigged down his liquor, but his eyes drove to the door. I looked at Laverne.

"Well, what's it to you?" I demanded again.

He nodded slightly, his hard red lips curving in a smile.

"A good deal," he answered again. "Tide's at the flood in a few minutes, and

I'm going out with it. I need three men—your kind. Hard work ahead, but a hundred a month in gold dollars; twenty quid, provided you live to earn it. Speak up quick."

"What sort of a barge have you?" inquired Freed, hesitant.

Laverne still looked at me as though he were not at all interested in any one else; however, he made prompt reply.

"Schooner, auxiliary power, three-man crew. Chartered to a Holy Joe. All hands work."

"Where to?" piped up Halvers. "I say, Cap'n, where to?"

"What the hell do you care?" I flung angrily at him. "You're on, Cap'n. Ready?"

"Aye, and you'd better be," said Laverne. "Come along."

He turned and stalked out of the place so rapidly that he was gone almost before we realized it. Subdued oaths and guarded calls came to us from every hand; no joke sailin' with the likes of him; chances enough to get clear—best leave the devil be and skip into the bush. D'ye mind how him and that Jap pearler fouled gear and took to shooting it out? . . .

I was outside now, following the wide shouldered figure, and the confused voices died out behind me. Liquor or not, I was frightened; facing a murder charge under English law is no attractive gamble. Freed was stumbling along behind me, his feet hard to control, and Halvers was on a trot, trying to keep up with Laverne's long legged stride.

"Hey! This ain't the way to the consulate!" said Freed suddenly. "We got to be signed on regular—"

"Shut up!" said Laverne without looking around. His voice had a rasp in it. "Go back to the consulate, if you want to. Close up, now. Stow your yap!"

We were upon the waterfront now, in the little street where the Japs and Chinese hang out; you may recall the scene. Untidy street, cabins on either side, women's voices calling, and the clean fine stars blotted out by the sins of men. A few people were lolling along the street, and Japanese voices rose chattering and laughing. Suddenly one voice crackled up, and a lithe dark shape hurtled in upon us. I caught a knife flash, saw Laverne duck and swerve, heard the solid clump as his fist landed hard.

The dark shape went reeling and staggering into the shadows and was gone.

"All right, Shimoku!" said Laverne without excitement. "I'll get you for this—later."

All the while we headed on, not stopping, the three of us crowded in behind Laverne, and in another moment the beach shanties opened out before us. Stars and riding lights glinted in the harbor; if any one had hoped to get Laverne alone our presence dissuaded them, for we had no further trouble at all. Laverne laughed and pointed to the lights of a steamer out beyond the reef.

"There's your *Anna Nelson* lads," he said. "Tinkering at her engines and sicking the law on you. Stay by her if you like. Here's my boat— Hop up, Sooey! Got my men and we're off."

A whaleboat lay before us, a small figure uncurling itself from the stern; Laverne and his cook must have rowed ashore by themselves. We shoved her out and put off, with some trouble, since she had a heavy load of boxes and bags aboard. Laverne took the steering oar and we headed out across the harbor, threading our way among the pearling luggers and trading craft dotting the roads.

I knew, if the others did not, that there was something queer about Laverne. He was not paying able seamen a hundred gold per month unless there was a crooked note about his ship, or cargo, or destination. However, what matter? As long as we got out of the frying pan now, we could take our chance about getting out of the fire later on.

We came in under the rail of a small schooner, rocking gently at her moorings, and Laverne sent up a hail. A shrill treble voice made response.

"All set, Cap'n! The reverend's asleep. Got clearance?"

"Yes." Laverne turned to us. "All up, lads. We'll bring in the boat as she is and unload later. Snap into it, you three. No time to lose, and no loud talking."

Sooey was already over the rail and gone like a monkey. As we followed I noticed that the schooner showed no riding lights. Then we were abruptly into fast, silent work, with Laverne driving us and his treble voiced mate, a hulking fat figure in the starlight, padding about like a baby elephant. At the moment, all three of us took for granted that this hurried silence was because Laverne wanted to get us clear of Port Austin; but we might have had more sense. There was more of a menace than the *Anna Nelson*, had we known it.

Click of davit ratches, clatter of turning capstan, slatting of canvas and squeak of block—there was none of these sounds. The hawser was slipped and buoyed, the whaleboat was trailed behind, the schooner slid silently away with the tide and the strong current that pulls out past Harkness Point. It was twenty minutes before Laverne, at the helm, lifted his voice to the big mate in the bow.

"All right, Steve. Boat in first."

We fell to work, got in the boat and emptied her load on the deck. I was taking stock of Steve while we worked. The big fellow said little, fell to the job with the rest of us and possessed all the amazing agility which is sometimes found in a fat man. He was no bully; that treble voice of his was ludicrous, but he knew his business.

We were outside the point now and had the land breeze. Our dull brown canvas went up, and the schooner heeled over gently. Laverne called to me.

"You—your name?"

"Irwin."

"Take the wheel. Hold her as she is—"

A test, this; there was no binnacle light. I held her by the stars, and she steered sweetly. Laverne watched me a moment, then turned to Steve, who was at his elbow.

"We've thrown 'em off. Shimoku tried to knife me in town. I didn't wait."

Steve grunted.

"Bet you a dollar, Cap'n, they're after us this minute."

Laverne made no response. I stood at the wheel and wondered. A preacher asleep below, this strange departure—what did it all mean? Well, so far as I was concerned, it meant that I was out of Port Austin, and glad of it. The rest could wait.

WE WERE at sea when I wakened and got on deck. The fumes of liquor were gone and I was hungry, but my brain was sharp enough. The schooner was kicking right along in a dead, glassy calm; land was out of sight; and I judged she was doing seven knots with her gas engine. Her name, painted on a boat slung near me, was the *Kestrel*.

Freed was at the helm and no one else was in sight. He waved a hand to me, but I disregarded him for the moment, located the galley, and Sooey rewarded me with a mug of hot coffee and a mess kid of excellent stew. These I took aft and communed with Freed as I ate. He was enjoying himself, as the reckless, challenging blue eyes bore witness; with him, yesterday was gone and forgotten, he was ready for more trouble, and cared not a whit whence it came. This craft, according to his reckoning, was made for trouble.

"What's a preacher aboard for?" he said, jerking his head at the cabin skylight. "And not a soul on deck except us. They's a rack o' rifles down there. I seen 'em plain. Three of us for'ard—four, with the chink. Three aft, talkin' over breakfast this minute. No discipline; no nothin'. Deck's a mess, too."

It was a mess and no mistake—a puttied deck, like all these craft in the hot seas, unwashed, with lines coiled any old way and nothing tidied up. No fresh paint anywhere; nothing shined up. This looked queer to me, for I had put Laverne down as a seaman.

"Better go slow," I said. "Better not take things for granted; this Laverne is deep."

"Deep my eye!" grunted Freed in scorn. "He's got a scrap on with some Jap pearler, that's what, and needs us to do his fighting. Where's that damned Limey?"

"Asleep," I said, and took my mug and mess kid back to the galley. As I returned our after guard was coming on deck.

Laverne and Steve, the fat mate, and after them the Holy Joe—coming up on deck, with a look around and a long stare at us. The mate showed up in daylight as a fat faced chap, but his jaw was solid enough; he and Laverne were in pajamas. The preacher was a little man with white hair, a bronzed face like a dried nut, and sparkling eyes; he wore clericals but they were of tailored white tussur silk, and the man himself looked like ready money. He wore a big amethyst ring with a crest cut in the stone. When he nodded and smiled to us his eyes were friendly.

"Well, lads," said Laverne with his hearty, but calm, manner, "we're off. Where's your pal?"

"Asleep," said Freed, and Laverne looked at him steadily for a moment. "Asleep, sir."

"That's better. Go fetch him." He looked at me. "Take the wheel."

Freed gave me the course and went forward to rouse up Halvers. Laverne and Steve stood talking at the rail, low voiced. The preacher came up to me and spoke.

"You're an American, I understand? My name is Bracken—Dr. Theodore Bracken. If we're to be shipmates for the next week or so—"

"Hey, Doctor!" Laverne hailed him, and jerked his head. "Come over here, will you? One point about this we want to get straight."

The doctor joined them. I could not help wondering at his presence aboard here; he answered some question, then came back to me, ruffling up his white hair with one very capable looking hand. Old he might be, but he was spry.

"Never been in New Zealand, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes, until the end of the year," I told him. "I was in Feilding for about three months—on the newspaper there."

"Eh? Eh?" His sparkling eyes pierced into me. "You know Tom Miller, do you?"

I laughed at his surprise.

"Of course. Tom gave me my job; a square shooter and a real man. I'm going back in the game with him one of these days."

"Well, well, upon my word!" said Bracken.

He went back to the rail and talked excitedly, and I saw Laverne give me a half scowling, half amused glance.

Now, however, Freed appeared, and by the big fellow's swagger I saw that Halvers must have fetched some liquor aboard. Behind him trailed the little red headed Cockney; and I felt an odd distaste for them both. Good rowdies in a pinch, good men to fight beside; but a brief exchange of words with a man like Bracken was enough to jerk me out of any feeling of companionship with the pair. The very sunlight and sea wind seemed to put distance between us.

"Now, my lads, let's to business," said Laverne crisply as he faced us. "My name's Laverne, master of the *Kestrel*. This is my mate, Steve. This is my passenger and charter party, Dr. Bracken. Your names?"

We gave them, and he nodded.

"Good. We made our terms last night—twenty quid a month. We're all white men aboard here, except the cook, and things can be pretty free and easy—if you let 'em be so. But you're going to work hard; we're all going to work hard as the devil, and we're going to start in now. Any objections?"

Halvers touched his forelock and peered around as though expecting work to tap him on the shoulder; but Freed laughed, his eyes on those of Laverne.

"If there's slaving to be done, I guess niggers can do it, can't they?" he said.

"No use beating around the bush, Cap'n. Not with us. We're no chickens, and can put two an' two in the pot to make four. What's your game, anyhow?"

Laverne nodded again, as though he had expected this line of talk. He gave the mate a glance.

"I expect, Steve," he said mildly, "you'd better show Freed just what our game is. He's that sort."

"I figured so," said Steve in his shrill voice, and moved down on the three of us.

His fat features were cherubic enough, but his eyes gave warning.

"Look here—"

Freed started to speak, but Steve's fist checked the words. What a wallop it was! Freed staggered back, then tore in with an oath, but he never touched Steve. Unexcitedly, Steve landed a jab that brought Freed's arms down, and then crossed his right and knocked Freed clear across the deck. He was after him like a cat, caught him again as he was rising, and stretched him flat. As an exhibition of quickness, it was marvelous.

Halvers stood half crouched, alert, venomous, hand at side. Laverne regarded him calmly.

"Try it, Halvers."

"Who, me?" The little rat relaxed. "Not me, sir. It ain't me style, to be givin' lip to an orfcer."

"Good idea," said Laverne. "Get your breakfast and turn to."

HALVERS went forward. Freed was up now, hanging on to his jaw and looking murder at Steve, who regarded him stolidly.

"Had enough?" asked the mate.

"No, you—"

Before the epithet was finished, Freed toppled over, and this time he took a good battering. It was enough for him, and he went forward with Steve. Laverne turned to me, and a queer smile broke on his square, blue jowled features. Dr. Bracken, who had watched the proceedings without comment, produced a pipe and pouch.

"Sad but necessary, eh?" he observed, his eyes following Freed and the mate.

Laverne grunted, holding me with his eyes.

"Feel like work, Irwin?" he demanded.

I nodded.

"Naturally, sir."

"Any questions to ask?"

"I don't see why you don't save fuel. Might need it later."

He followed my look to the catspaws creeping over the glassy water, then clapped me on the shoulder.

"You'll do. You're just the man I want. Take the wheel, Doctor, and we'll get some canvas on her. Wind coming up at last. Oh, Steve!"

So Bracken, to my astonishment, stood up to the wheel as though he'd been doing it all his life, and the rest of us pitched in. Freed was cured of his insolence, if not of his curiosity, and he was a good hand. In no time at all the *Kestrel* was leaning over to a freshening breeze. She must have been recently cleaned, for she slipped through the water like a witch.

This began our work—and as Laverne had said, it was real work. We broke out paint and stores and went over the little schooner from waterline to truck—quite literally. Where she had been a faded red, we made her a glistening white; holystoned the deck, varnished the spars, and even made some changes in her rig. A whole box of brasswork was broken out, and we stuck that on her here and there—rails and so forth. It was all gimcrack stuff, but it helped enormously in changing a dirty little trading schooner into a privately owned pleasure craft. We changed the name to *Wastrel*, and there were ready made brass letters to be applied, too. The *Wastrel* she became, of Auckland, N. Z.

All this took time, days of it, and it took hard labor. All of us pitched in, stripped to the waist, except Sooey, who kept to his galley, and Bracken, who took every other trick at the wheel as his share of the labor, alternating with Laverne. For the rest of us it was plod-plod work, with never a breath as to rhyme or reason, and

no explanation except what we could frame up for ourselves. As the final touch brand new canvas was broken out to replace our brown, patched sails.

We kept no regular watches, except at the wheel; the weather was fair and we traveled right along with hardly a hitch at the lines. Freed made no more trouble; he was too dog weary to think of it, and we were so well fed that we were content enough.

And curious, too. Halvers thought that we were going pearl raiding. Freed conjectured we were going to make a descent on some island and pull off a piratical job. I did not waste time thinking about it. We had happened along at the right moment to fit it with Laverne's plans—this was clear, and this was enough. He and Bracken had cooked up this cruise quite awhile back, as everything proved; their arrangements had taken time and money.

I liked Bracken, though I saw little of him. He was a gentleman, and when he wanted things done he had a way with him; he had given orders in his day, and from a quarterdeck, I judged. As the work progressed I took note that Laverne seemed to take a liking to me. Now and again he dipped into my past, in a friendly way, and from casual inferences I gathered that he was ready enough to trust me; but he never opened his head about the purpose of our voyage.

Then, out of a clear sky, I had trouble with my companions, for the first time.

It was sunset, and we had just finished with the new canvas after a grueling day. Freed was drawing up buckets of water to empty over us, and I relieved him at the rope. Halvers slipped on the wet deck, and as he went down Freed gave him a playful shove that sent him clear to the opposite scuppers. I laughed and emptied the bucket into Freed's face, never thinking of it except as a joke. To my amazement, he whirled on me, sputtering oaths.

"I've had my eye on you, blast your dirty hide," he roared, suddenly furious. "You need your needin's and you'll get 'em now—"

With this, he let me have it, and next instant we were at it hammer and tongs.

Freed, I believe, must have always resented my mode of speech and action, which was not his; perhaps he fancied a feeling of superiority on my part. At any rate, his actions held all the fury of a secretly cherished grudge and he did me a good deal of damage before I realized he was in earnest. Fortunately, I am a rather large person in build; so when I got the heft of my body into one good punch, it stopped him, and my next rocked him back on his heels. I knocked against Halvers, kicked him out of my way, and was boring in for the finish to the solar plexus when I saw Freed's eyes flick past me. I whirled around to find Halvers lunging in with a knife, rat teeth exposed in a snarl.

It was fast while it lasted, but it did not last long. I hooked Halvers under the chin, knocked his knife overboard, took a fast one from Freed and then went into him proper. He was finished by the time Laverne, who had seen the rumpus from aft, got to us. The skipper gave me a grin and a flick of his head.

"Come on below. Want to see you."

Steve padded aft and took the wheel. I followed Laverne down to the cabin, where Bracken was sitting at the table. Laverne got out a bottle of squareface and three glasses and poured a good drink all around.

"Irwin's all right, Doctor," he said. "Just as I thought. It's worth having the others to get hold of him. Here's luck to us, and a health to Cap'n Bracken of the *Wastrel!*"

"It's none of my business," I said, when we had put down the drink, "and you haven't asked for my opinion; but I know that port officers are pretty strict in these parts, and I don't see how Dr. Bracken can get by with it—"

They both chuckled at this.

"Don't worry," said Bracken. "I've the papers all shipshape and proper, my friend. But we want to ask you something, Irwin. Some men do as they're told; others have brains; you may recall the basic philosophic maxim of teaching

according to the capacity of reception. Now, we've made preparations to commit a certain act which, in the eyes of the law, may be considered a crime. We have an excellent chance of getting away with it and of making a good deal of money. It may, however, involve fighting. We'd like to have you with us. We can use your brains. Our friend Steve, I might say, is not a factor in the game at all, for reasons you'll know later on. Now, where do you stand?"

I had to laugh at this amazing proposition.

"Gentlemen, let's go easy," I returned. "Are you a clergyman, Bracken, or not?"

"From now on I'm Captain Bracken of this ship," he said rather curtly. "Never mind what I am or am not, otherwise. I have every confidence that what we propose to do is ethically right, if that's what you're driving at. It's not piracy or anything of the sort—except as appearance might indicate."

I glanced at Laverne and both of us broke into laughter.

"Well, what is your ethically right and legally wrong action, then?" I asked.

"That I refuse to tell you," said Bracken. "Only Laverne and I know of it. No one else is going to know of it in advance."

That stumped me, for a moment.

I SAT down at the table, poured another drink and fingered the glass as I met the sparkling eyes of Bracken. That little old man, brown and hard as a nut, was the real boss here—the brains behind Laverne's brawn.

"What," I asked thoughtfully, "about Shimoku?"

The shot went home. Bracken frowned and compressed his lips, and Laverne broke into a sudden hearty laugh.

"I said he had brains!" He clapped Bracken on the shoulder. "Didn't I tell you?"

I leaned forward.

"Come, gentlemen," I said coolly. "You can't expect a man to run his neck into a fighting mess unless he knows what he's fighting for. I'm a seaman by necessity and lack of silver, but it's not my trade; I'm a newspaper man. As such, I have a fairly comprehensive idea of laws, courts and so forth. I might rob for money, but not unless I was starving. I wouldn't rob just to get money. I don't care to be a thief. I don't care to have the law chasing me all my life. Money isn't worth it. But—there are exceptions."

"Hm!" said Bracken, while Laverne scowled at me. "I admire the delicacy of your reasoning, which isn't really worth a tinker's dam. Let's go at it another way. If you overpowered a thief and took a twenty-pound note from him, would you keep the note or try to find the rightful owner?"

"I'd keep it," I said promptly.

Laverne put down his glass and exploded in an oath.

"Damn you and your arguments, Irwin!" he rasped, his voice no longer calm. "We're bound for a spot in the western Carolines, we're going to take away a fortune from a rascally Jap, and you're in on the job with us. Understand?"

I met his black rimmed blue eyes and smiled.

"I rather think you're right," I said. "Here's luck!"

There our talk ended—on that word. I was dead beat with work, Freed had hammered me a bit, and I wanted sleep. So I went and took it, postponing further talk until later. One thing had come of it all; I was pretty much on an equality with Laverne and Bracken now.

With the next day I found that the old comradeship was clean gone; I had enemies, and vindictive ones. Freed did not disguise his dislike, and Halvers merely growled when I spoke to him. So we ceased speaking, the three of us, and that held things in abeyance without curing them by a long shot.

We were all of us too busy finishing up the alteration of the old *Kestrel* to take time off for indulging our personal animosities, however. Laverne was making

a good job of it, not overlooking any details. All this while we saw not a sail breaking the horizon, and the wind holding, we were not forced to burn up petrol.

I could see now why three white men had been wanted as crew. Try as she would, no usual trading schooner or pearler with her complement of blacks, could very well pose as any yacht or pleasure craft; but we could now hope to get by with it very decently. Bracken was no trader; this stood out all over him. As for the rest of us, Laverne outfitted us with white uniforms. He even had natty caps with *Wastrel* on them in gold letters. These were served out with orders to lay them by until the time came.

The transformation even extended to the cabin, which was tricked out with new stain and varnish and a few fancy pictures; and with this we were all set. Freed and Halvers never did any talking before me, but as the days passed I gained a fairly accurate idea of what they thought about it all. A word here, a look there, spoke volumes; so did their very caution, their subservience. But one night I got an inkling of the truth, when they exchanged a few words on coming off watch, thinking me still asleep.

"Go easy, now, with Steve," said Freed under his breath. "None o' your damned lip, get me? We want to help 'em pull it off."

"Blime, I ain't crabbin' it!" whined Halvers. "But I'd like to put a knife in 'im, s'elp me! I'll remember, matey; right y'are."

"You'd better, damn you!" said Freed. "Whatever it is, they ain't goin' to pull it off without a scrap. Watch your step, get me?"

"Aye," said Halvers.

They were lying low for the present—and they always would lie low, I told myself as I held the *Wastrel* to her course under the swinging stars. A vast contempt for the pair of them filled me; I despised myself for having companioned with them so recently. That, however, had been necessity, and now our ways had sundered. Freed was bold enough and bad enough, but Laverne had him backed down on both counts, or I missed my guess. I was under no illusions about Laverne, but at least he was straight and no coward. Freed was crooked, and Halvers was a rank coward, so Laverne could handle them well enough. And this, so far as I was concerned, let them both out.

Bracken and Laverne said never a word more about their plans, but I became rather thick with Bracken, for we often talked together, especially at night, and I got glimpses into his past. He was, or had been, a preacher; he had also been a navy man, probably in his younger days or during the war. Superficially he was a gentle, lovable chap, but under the surface he had a streak of cold fire. He knew New Zealand intimately, and I gathered that he had been located there for a long time, though his people were from around Norfolk, in England.

As to Laverne, he was a rough and tumble chap with enough brains to have pulled himself out of the rut. He must have been trading around among the islands for years; he knew everything and every one, to hear him talk. And, what was more important, many of them knew him. Morals, scruples, ethics—he had none at all. Like most men who get anywhere, however, he had a little code all his own, and stuck to it.

"Remember that mate of the *Anna Nelson*, do you?" he said to me one day, like a bolt from the blue. "Well, I figure I know which one o' you three lads bashed in his head."

"Maybe you do," I said.

He grinned.

"Uh-huh. And you watch out for him, my lad. He won't fancy havin' you or the Limey tell the judge what you know, if you're ever forced. He won't fancy it by half! Chew on that, and don't you forget it."

This, indeed, gave me something to think about in relation to Freed.

"Look out for him your own self," I returned.

Laverne rolled a cool oath on his tongue.

"Remember when I walked into Jack's Bar and looked the three of you over?" he said. "I knew then and there that I wanted you, Irwin—just you. Freed's good for fist bait and maybe bullet stoppage; Halvers is a sewage rat, but the both of 'em can do work for better men till they kick in. Huh! Don't worry about me. Not for a minute! I've lived with a damned sight worse rogues than those two, and buried 'em afterward."

Which, I made no doubt, was true enough.

There came an afternoon when Laverne and Bracken both worked hard over their calculations, and that evening took star sights and did more figuring. Going on deck at midnight, eight bells, I found the wind dying out and Steve at work down in the engine room with a lantern. He was not starting the engine, however.

Bracken took me to the rail, linking his arm in mine.

"Wind's dying, but it'll lift again with daybreak," he said. "I'm going to turn in and leave you on watch; call me if you see any lights, or if the wind springs up again. Otherwise, smoke up and take your ease. We'll raise the island with daylight and be there soon after."

"What island?" I asked.

He chuckled.

"Nanmuk, if that means anything to you—which it won't," he returned, and left me. Then he came back to me, as though repenting his close mouthed attitude. "Cheerio, lad," he said softly. "You'll have it all soon enough; aye, and perhaps more than you look for! Never heard of the Croft case, eh? Well, Croft's real name was Bracken, and he was my brother—"

"Ho, Bracken!" Laverne's head came up from the companionway. "Come along below and go over a few things before I turn in, will you?"

So Bracken abruptly left me to the stars and my reflections.

Croft was his brother, eh? That put a new light on affairs, and I racked my brains trying to recall the Croft case. The story had broken while I was in Feilding, and I recalled that Tom Miller had been greatly exercised over the matter, which for a time had threatened international relations. Then, like such things, it had blown over and been relegated to the hands of some investigating committee, and so forgotten. But Bracken, it appeared, had by no means forgotten.

Details of the affair slowly came back to me as I watched the stars and the empty darkness of the horizon; but I could not get the key detail to link up with Bracken. Croft had been his brother, yes—a trader long established in a little nook of the Carolines. Ever since these islands were given Japan under the post-war mandate, Croft had had trouble; and it had ended in his death. No one knew what had happened. A tramp schooner had wandered in, had found Japanese established there, and no sign of Croft except his grave. That was all I could recall of the story. It had provoked all sorts of trouble, but nothing had come of it. And the key link was missing.

Toward dawn the wind sprang up, and I called Bracken. He set a course for the N. N. E. and got Steve and Laverne on deck, and he took the wheel while the three of us worked over a mysterious and damnably heavy packing case we had fetched up from the hold the previous evening.

I had already observed a large iron plate made fast to the deck almost at the stern rail, behind the helm, and now discovered the reason. The packing case yielded up a small and highly polished brass cannon of ornate design; the metal plate had been especially made for it, and within twenty minutes it was securely bolted in place. Apparently such a cannon as would be carried by a private craft for saluting, it was in reality a rapid fire three-pounder that had been touched up with a few brass mountings and, with a tarpaulin lashed tightly in place about it, was soon snugly stowed.

"You must be anticipating a regular naval engagement," I said to Laverne as we finished the work.

"I am," he returned. "We may wish yet that we had brought along an anti-aircraft gun as well. Go rouse up those lads for'ard; everybody in uniform, too—"

"Land ho!" came Bracken's voice.

Day was breaking, and now we saw what we had been too busy to see—a bluish bulge over the horizon, dead ahead. Laverne went into the shrouds like a cat and took a look.

"That's Nanmuk, all right," he sang out jubilantly. "Good work, Bracken! A couple of hours and we'll be in, with the breeze that's coming up. No doubt about it. See the dot over to the east'ard? That's the reef with the clump o' trees. All right, Irwin! Rouse 'em up!"

I went forward, wakened Freed and Halvers and got into my uniform. We had reached our destination.

YOU MAY well believe that I was astonished when we came close hauled into the little bight that was Nanmuk anchorage and saw what was there.

As the charts show, Namuk is only a dot to the south of the group, several of which cloud the northern horizon. It is an island just above the water, lying nearly flat and pear shaped. The stem of the pear, to the eastward, runs off in a false atoll among a labyrinth of coral reefs to a hummock two miles distant, crowned with a tuft of palms. Thanks to the coral, the only safe anchorage is the little bight at the western side, an indentation in the shore which gives protection against any but a west wind, which is not prevalent there.

The morning was still young when we heeled into the cove, came about and let go our canvas as we rounded to anchorage. Laverne's whistle shrilled, and we cast off the tarpaulin of the gun and fired a blank cartridge; very smartly we did it, too, for all our stares at what greeted us.

We had anticipated the sight of a trader's iron roofed house and store and sheds nestling under the trees. Instead, we found a wide clearing in which was set a square structure of dazzling white coral blocks. A quarter mile to the left, at the upper tip of the cove, were two large godowns of the same construction, with a coral rock jetty that extended a hundred feet out from shore. Against this jetty lay a little bathtub of a steamer, booms out and winches rattling; she was loading from hand cars pushed out on rails along the jetty. Behind the godowns were the thatched roofs of native huts. Close to the steamer was anchored a schooner. Near the large square house were wireless masts, and a flagstaff atop the house carried the Rising Sun flag. Numbers of black men were in sight, and not a few trim little Japanese, all in white uniforms.

"Whew!" I heard Bracken exclaim as he lowered his glasses. "All right, Laverne! Dip the ensign."

Our ensign was dipped, and a Jap dipped the flag on the staff in response; then a boat came out toward us from the jetty as we dropped our hook and made snug. Two yellow men in uniform were in the stern; four others rowed.

Now I noticed for the first time that Steve had vanished from sight. We put out the gangway. Bracken stood by the companionway, and I heard Steve's voice come faintly to him from below. He turned to Laverne at the gangway.

"All right. He says that's Shimoku himself—the elder brother. Watch your step."

Laverne touched his cap.

I stared at the boat. So there were two brothers Shimoku, were there? Not hard to place which of the two men in the boat was the boss. One man was young, alert, surgeon's case in his hand; probably the port doctor. The other was older, with a gray mustache and deeply seamed face—a broad, cheerful face wearing a smile as the boat came in alongside.

The two men came aboard, received a smart salute and looked around amazedly as they went aft to greet Bracken. I could not hear what was said; there was a

good deal of bowing and handshaking, then Shimoku went below with Bracken and the doctor came with Laverne to where the three of us, with Sooey, were lined up for inspection.

"There iss no need, sir," said the doctor, after a glance at us. "I thank you. I go ashore now and the boat comes back after awhiles, yess."

So he was taken back, and Laverne set us to work getting the gear stowed shipshape. The boat returned to us after landing the doctor, and presently Bracken came on deck, with Shimoku at his elbow. He beckoned to Laverne.

"Mister," he announced, "this is Captain Shimoku, president of the company that owns this island and the trading hereabouts. This is Mr. Laverne, my chief officer, Captain Shimoku. If you can have some fresh vegetables and fruit sent aboard, and perhaps a pig or so, Mr. Laverne will attend to payment."

Laverne saluted. Bracken said that he was going ashore for luncheon, and went down into Skimoku's boat, and they were rowed away to a small landing near the square house.

"All right, lads," said Laverne to us. "Let's finish getting everything stowed, then we'll rig the awning and be done with the job, and you can get out of the sun. Irwin, you stand watch."

So, presently, I was alone on deck, comfortably stretched out in a Singapore chair; Freed and Halvers were below. Laverne appeared, looking none too easy in his duck uniform, and got rid of an oath as he joined me.

"Devilish hot, eh? Well, we've bit off a hot one and no mistake. That tinpot over yonder can cook our goose; we gambled she'd be away, blast the luck! I know her. She carries a gun or two and has new engines."

Accepting a cigaret, I gave him a whimsical look and a light.

"It does look like a job," I observed. "Ready to talk now? Who are the Shimoku brethren?"

"Main bad 'uns," he said gravely. "This chap scragged Croft—the cap'n's brother—and took over everything. Paid not a farthing, either. His brother is cap'n of a pearling lugger; the one we met at Port Austin, d'ye mind. He knows me. This chap does not. Nobody here knows me, so we're safe enough."

"Yes?" I returned. "And what about Steve?"

Laverne gave me a sidewise look and chuckled.

"Not so slow, are you? Steve was manager here for Croft. Was away with his schooner when the smash came, and hunted up Bracken. They know Steve, and he knows them. Steve told Bracken about the stuff here; Steve, you see, managed it all for Croft, who was pretty old toward the end."

"Clear as mud," I observed. "Start at the beginning, will you? Is it pearls?"

He nodded.

"Croft pottered around and located a bed over among the coral reefs to the eastward; a virgin bed, never touched. He was a queer old coot; didn't care much for money, made enough to be comfortable here, and so forth. He was at outs with his family, I gather. He and Steve got out the best of the bed and had the shell here on the beach when Shimoku blew in one day—not this one; t'other. Those Japs can smell pearl fifty mile away. Anybody can, for that matter, if the wind's right."

He chuckled and dragged at his cigaret.

"Shimoku went off, but Croft saw trouble coming and sent Steve out to look up Bracken. Offered him half of all the pearls. Steve came back with word from him, found Croft dead and the Jap company installed here, and skipped in a hurry. Then things got into the international dispute class, but it never came out that Croft's real name was Bracken, d'ye see? So that's the lay of it."

"Fine!" I commented. "And you've come back to arrest Shimoku for the murder, eh? Or else to get the pearls. Neither one's very likely to happen."

Laverne winked at me.

"Cheer up, old boy! You see, Croft

hid those pearls, and told Steve where they'd be if anything went wrong. Wouldn't send 'em out, like a fool, until he'd heard from Bracken. They're over on the hummock where nobody ever goes. All we need to do is to get a boat ashore there, get me? Half an hour will do it. Bracken is handing out some talk about scientific work and collecting corals and so forth. If they don't smell a rat, we'll get the boat ashore tomorrow. If they do—well, we meant to land in spite of hell or high water, and we'll do it, but we may have a row. And time's short."

"Why? The other Shimoku will be after you?" I asked.

"Exactly. We're old enemies, him and me." Laverne showed his big white teeth in a snarl, just like a dog. "I raided his pearl beds once, and raided that schooner of his once. He's scored on me likewise. Wiped out six of my men—all but me, in fact—about three months back; but it cost him something. I got three sticks of dynamite down his companionway, and sent his schooner and a cargo o' shell to Davy Jones. He got away, blast him!"

I frowned at him in some wonder.

"But won't his brother know your name?"

"Not yet." Laverne broke into sudden hearty laughter. "My right name's Lew Steele. What I'm sailing under now is for this cruise only."

LEW STEELE! I had never suspected it, of course; I had heard the name, but had never met the man. According to all report, he was a second Bully Hayes—nothing less than a pirate, and a brutal one. I caught a twinkling glance from Laverne.

"Heard of me, have you?" he asked.

"Some. In pretty bad odor, by all accounts, aren't you? But I'm satisfied if you are. Why don't you slip down for'ard and tell those precious pals of mine who you are and a bit about your business here?"

He nodded slowly, fingering his chin in a way he had when thinking.

"Not a bad notion by half, Irwin. By the way, I figure we have two days before the other Shimoku gets here with his lugger. But figures may lie—and anyhow, he may not get here."

Laverne rose and stretched.

"I rather think we will, though; he probably recognized Steve and may guess what we're doing. You see, they know there are pearls somewhere about. So long."

He sauntered away forward and vanished. That he fulfilled his errand was evident when I next saw Freed and Halvers. They were excited enough, and treated Laverne's orders with an obedience that was almost ludicrous in its alacrity; but they did not show any friendliness to me. That is, not until the hot and weary afternoon was half gone. Then, as we were overhauling the whaleboat and filling it with water to swell the seams, Freed gave me a look and a grin.

"Know who he is—Lew Steele, huh? That's different. Bygones are bygones, kid. Suit you?"

"You bet," I assented. "It's all hang together or be blown to hell, so let's stick."

Halvers grimaced at me from the other side of the whaleboat.

"Bloody well right, I say," he whined fawningly. "White men 'ad best 'ang together, wot? These 'ere Japs fair gives me the creeps!"

Which was as it should be; but I did not trust either of them around the corner.

Along toward four in the afternoon, Bracken came out alone. When we saw the boat fetching him, Laverne gave me a sign and I went below to the cabin. Steve was there, well back from an open port facing the island, binoculars in his hand. He was sweating, for it was hot down below and hotter still in the windless cove.

"My Lord," he said plaintively, "this is a hell of a job! Well, we'll find out something now, and no mistake."

We did, too. Bracken came aboard and passed up some baskets of vegetables and fruit and paid for it, then dropped below

with Laverne and tore off his hot coat.

"I've been devilish polite for about five hours," he exclaimed. "Never saw anything to equal it; I might have been the Lord High Admiral in person! This Shimoku is a deuced pleasant sort of chap, if you take him aright, but one has the feeling that underneath his smile he's a cat. Big cat. Tiger."

"He is," said Laverne seriously. "Him and his brother both. What news?"

"Bad. Politely bad, but bad," returned Bracken. "That steamer came in yesterday and will be here for a couple of days at least. Their company collects the stuff here, it seems, from the other islands, and the steamer carts it away. So we may as well face that much of risk. Fancy I pulled the wool over Shimoku's eyes fairly well. As Steve says, there's some fancy coral around the hummock. I'm going to get an early start in the morning and go over there to get some specimens."

"What?" Laverne's blue eyes blazed out. "It's all right, is it?"

Bracken wiped sweat from his nut brown cheeks.

"Quite all right. Shimoku's going along to guide me and so forth, in a boat of his own."

We were silent for a moment. Steve rumbled an oath, his fat face scowling. Laverne's blue jowled cheeks were suddenly inflamed.

"The devil!" he snapped out, that seldom heard rasp in his voice, fingers gripping at the table edge. "Know what that means, Bracken?"

"Am I a fool?" There was a tension upon us all as Bracken made answer. "It means that we must look alive, gentlemen; and I've mapped out the details. Here you are! I'll take the whaleboat; Laverne, Irwin, Freed and Halvers at the oars. We leave an hour before sunrise, to get there and back before the heat of the day. Steve, how long will it take us to reach the hummock?"

Steve pursed up his lips, then replied:

"An hour or less. You'll have the morning breeze and can use the sail going over. Wind dies down after sunrise, for half an hour or so, then comes up steady."

"As I thought." Bracken nodded, his eyes sparkling. "Give us an hour and a half, Steve. Then start the engine and slip the cable."

"Like hell!" growled Laverne. "How many bowers d'ye think we carry?"

"We'll pick up the one we left at Port Austin when we get back." Bracken flung him a smile. "Steve, you take the ship out with the engine, and pick us up off the hummock. Even if they suspect something, they'll be slow in following; we'll take the chance of that. If we can get through the coral where the steamer can't follow, well and good; if we can get off to sea, better still. We'll have to make a fight of it, that's sure. One good thing, the glass is falling and tomorrow may bring wind."

"It may bring hell also," said Steve seriously. "There are some bad electric storms at this season."

Bracken waved his hand.

"We'll chance that. The main thing is to get to the hummock and bring the stuff aboard. After that—fight. As to what happens at the hummock, I'll handle all that myself."

As he said this and looked at us I caught a light in Bracken's eye that made me doubt whether he had ever been a preacher in reality. Then I leaned forward.

"One thing you've all forgotten, or overlooked," I said. "These Japs aren't fools, you know, and they've got wireless masts. And the other Shimoku could have sent a radio message from Port Austin. You may be sitting in a very pretty little trap, for all you know."

Laverne and Bracken exchanged a startled look, then Bracken shrugged.

"We'll chance it," he said. "What about a drink, eh? Good idea."

WE GOT off as agreed, with the gray dawn lifting through the sky and the stars paling. Captain Shimoku hailed us from his boat and preceded us; he was in a skiff with small outboard motor, and only two men were with him.

"Now what d'ye think of it, eh!" said Laverne to me, as we ran up the whaleboat's sail and slipped through the dark waters with the land breeze. His tone was exultant. "The blighter has played into our hands for fair! We'll maroon his men, take him along, and couldn't have a better hostage. Eh?"

"Looks like it," I admitted. "But a Jap isn't easily fooled."

"Well, we've gone to a hell of a lot of work just to fool this rascal for a few hours, and we've done it. Lay over to port, all hands! Now we're making time."

The whaleboat leaned over to the breeze as we slid out of the little cove, and we sped along in the wake of Shimoku's boat, which made good time, the *putt-putt* of her exhaust echoing back from the trees of the shore. Bracken, at the steering oar, gave us our instructions in a low voice.

"Laverne, pass out a pistol all around. Let the rifles be. Keep the guns in your pockets until you see me act. Freed, you'll carry the spade. Everybody leave the talking to me."

From below the tarpaulin covering the bottom of the boat Laverne took out loaded automatic pistols and passed one to each of us. I saw rifles there, too, before he turned back the canvas and covered them.

The gray daylight slowly increased in strength until, as we swung around the tip of the pear shaped island, the reefs and tree crowned hummock ahead were clearly in sight. We were about a hundred yards behind the skiff, which circled the outer reefs and then headed directly for the little hummock. This circling took some time, and the red sun rays were shooting up the eastern sky as we drew in toward the hummock. I noted Laverne squinting hard at the main island and he caught my scrutiny.

"Nothing in sight," he muttered. "I reckon we've got him fooled, all right—looked too good to be true."

Bracken's voice came to us.

"I'll take Shimoku. Laverne, you look after his two men if they remain in the boat. If they come ashore, Irwin will help you cover them."

The hummock was not above a quarter mile across—a dune heap of white sand tufted with palms and thickly grown with brush. Shimoku was heading for a strip of beach on the south side and, as our canvas flapped, ran the nose of his skiff on the sand. The breeze had died out.

We got out the oars and rowed in. I half anticipated some trap and so had Laverne, as I could see by his tense attitude and searching scrutiny of the shore. If Shimoku had picked up a radio message from his brother and had sent men over here in the night, he could not have worked a neater game than to let us take him to the treasure and then nab us. However, we might have saved our worry. Bracken's ruse had worked. It was low tide, and the jagged coral teeth showed all around the hummock. This was the sole landing for a boat, and the white coral sand showed no marks of any landing or footprints.

Shimoku stood waiting for us to come ashore, his attitude one of smiling unconcern. His two men, who were Japs, drew their boat up a bit in the sand and put a thick fender under her stern so the outboard propeller would not sink in the sand, then squatted down at one side and looked at the sky. All was clear in the east and south, but masses of cloud were piling up in the west.

"We can not stay ver' long," said Shimoku pleasantly as we scraped the sand. "It make plenty bad weather soon. Maybe too soon. Squall, lightning—no typhoon."

"As long as there's no typhoon, we don't care," said Bracken. "All out! Stand by with that cord, Halvers."

"Aye, sir," said Halvers, as we jumped out and pulled up the whaleboat a bit.

I felt almost sorry for Shimoku in this moment; he was so smiling, so courteous, so unsuspecting. Bad he might be, but who of us was not? I think he caught some subtle warning as he stood there, for I saw his face change and take on a look

of queer wondering surmise while Bracken approached him. And with reason, for our little old nut brown skipper wore a new manner—an air of determination, of almost electric energy. Freed stood by the boat, while I sidled over beside Laverne, and Halvers followed Bracken.

"Something I want to tell you, Cap'n Shimoku," said Bracken, his voice suddenly crisp and clear as tinkling glass. "Something you never knew. Poor Croft was my brother."

For perhaps half a minute there was silence. The two squatting Japs, who evidently spoke no English, blinked at us and did not move. Shimoku, standing looking into the sparkling gaze of Bracken, must have comprehended everything in a moment. His heavy lidded eyes became murderous; his mouth drew down, then he bit at his lower lip, showing blackened stubs of teeth. He was not pretty. I lost all my half sympathy for him.

"So this explains it?" he said, hissing his words. "You look like him."

"Thanks," said Bracken. "You murdered him and seized everything he owned here. No use sparring; I know the whole thing. I'm not of your stripe, thank heaven! If I were, I'd put a bullet into you first and talk later. As it is, you can have your chance; go along quietly and you'll not be hurt. You know what I'm after."

Shimoku nodded slightly, then his gaze shifted to Laverne with a puzzled look. Laverne laughed.

"You damned yellowbelly, got an idea about me, have you?" he said. "Yes, you're right. I'm Lew Steele, and that blasted brother of yours knows me pretty well. Now you know who you're up against, what you going to do about it?"

The color drained out of Shimoku's face, and his eyes were positively venomous. He only lifted his hands, however, with a gesture of helplessness.

"You are ver' smart," he said quietly. "You have caught me, yes?"

"Tell your men to stand up and do what I make 'em do," said Laverne, and his pistol came out in his hand. Bracken's weapon leaped out and covered Shimoku, who paid no attention to it but spat a few words at his men. They stood up and, obeying a gesture from Laverne's pistol, stood back to back.

"Shoot 'em if they budge, Irwin," said Laverne to me, and I covered them.

Laverne went back to the boat and picked up a coil of light line. Halvers, who had a length of it, went up to Shimoku and frisked him; finding no weapon, he began to tie the arms of the Japanese behind his back. Under Bracken's orders he left a length of the line by which to keep his prisoner on the leash.

Laverne, meantime, was making a good job of the two men, trussing them back to back and tying up their legs to boot. When he had finished, he toppled them over into the sand and they stayed there.

Bracken took Shimoku's leash and motioned Halvers back.

"Stay here and watch the boats," he said. "If another boat shows up, give us two shots. Laverne, lead the way with Freed—you have Steve's instructions down by heart. Irwin, you bring up the rear. Let's go!"

So off we started into the brush, with Bracken prodding his captive ahead of him, and me following their trail.

The job was done; at least, the ticklish part of it was done. We were safe enough to get away with the loot, provided we found it, and the only uncertainty was as regarded Steve and the *Wastrel*. With Shimoku in our hands, we had gained everything. It spoke pretty loudly for what manner of man Bracken really was, that a roughneck bully like Lew Steele would take orders from him and gladly.

No one spoke; we marched along in the heat, struggling through the brush after Laverne and Freed, and Shimoku took his medicine like a man. If there had been any trail here, it was long since blown out or overgrown. Twice we stopped, then went on when Laverne had located himself. Any sight of the sea or the island was shut out by the brush; and, although the sun was only just over the

horizon, there was already enough heat to be uncomfortable. The western sky was now all spotted with patches of black cloud, though not in any solid mass.

Then we found ourselves in an opening at, I should say, the center of the hummock, with the tuft of palms rising high overhead. Laverne had halted beside a fragment of coral rock close to one of the trees, a jagged and uneven triangle rock.

"Here we are, Bracken!" he said, kicking at it. "Beside the corner away from the tree—that right?"

"Aye," said Bracken. "Let's get at it."

Freed put his spade into the sand and fell to work. He was sweating, more from excitement than from heat, and had discarded his uniform jacket. Naked to the waist, blond hair bleached by sun and wind, muscles rippling, he gave me a sudden impression of animal ferocity held in restraint; when he shook his hair aside and looked up at Laverne, the broken nose increased this impression. I felt a desire to scream out, to do something—

Then I remembered, and looked up at the sky. All of us were nervous, fidgety, apt to explode at abnormally slight irritation. Not only was there the tension of the supposed treasure at our feet, the suspense between exultation and discovery, but there was also the weather—the air was suddenly oppressive, had probably been so all morning without our realization. Only Shimoku did not share in our feelings. He stood motionless, silent, his eyes veiled and dead, like the eyes of a fish. A low roll of distant thunder, that shook the island beneath us like the smashing impact of surf, never got a quiver out of him. He was beaten and knew it.

Freed paused to rest, and Laverne took the spade and leaned his broad shoulders to the task, with a muttered oath of impatience. There was a hush, a terrible dead stillness, over everything; the rasp of the spade, the panting of Freed, the odor of sweat filled ears and nostrils. I saw Freed looking fixedly at Captain Shimoku.

"Struck something," said Laverne, and straightened up. He handed the spade to Freed. "Go ahead and finish it."

Freed stepped into the hole and scraped away, not looking up. I glanced at Shimoku and saw a change in his attitude. His eyes had opened and he looked more alert; what had passed in that exchange of looks with Freed? Then I laughed at myself and got out a cigaret. Nonsense, all of it; Freed would not dare anything.

"Feels like a box," said Freed.

Bracken stirred and held a match to his pipe.

"It's a small trunk with tinned meat and stuff in it," he said. "Croft had some notion of decamping and living on this island in case of necessity; he never did it. What we want is a mahogany box that's inside the trunk. Uncover it and smash off the lid if you can."

"Aye, sir," said Freed.

Almost insensibly, we had drawn closer to the fragment of coral rock and the hole in the sand beside it. The spade rasped and scraped; leaning forward, I saw that Freed was laying bare the top of a little old cheap trunk; it was not even a solid seaman's chest. As I looked, the spade drove down clear into it, with a rending crash of wood and canvas. Laverne reached out and pushed Freed aside.

"Here, let me finish it," he said. "Better be careful here—"

Freed scrambled out of the hole, his naked torso glistening with sweat. He was standing beside Shimoku now, and Bracken put the leash in his hand.

"Here, catch hold—and keep an eye on him!"

A crackling smash, and an exultant exclamation from Laverne! He had wrenched and broken away the top of the little trunk, and now flung it out of the hole. We crowded forward and looked down at what lay there.

We had won!

IN THE light of all that happened, it has since occurred to me that something must have passed between Freed and Shimoku which I missed—perhaps only a word or two. Or Freed and Halvers

may have known more than we thought, may have schemed up their deviltry beforehand, though this seems hardly likely. Perhaps all was done on the spur of the moment, indeed, and as it appeared at the time.

Laverne had exposed the top of the little trunk to view—the white sand was trickling down in torrents from the side of the hole. There were tins and wrapped packages, and in the center a stout mahogany box with a brass handle in the top. Laverne stooped to pluck at it, then abruptly straightened up.

Two pistol shots came to us, reverberating, imperative, from beyond the wall of brush and trees. The signal arranged with Halvers.

All of us were transfixed for an instant; then Bracken's voice broke the silence.

"All right, Laverne, take it on the jump!" he cried sharply. "We'll follow—"

He leaped into the hole, as Laverne scrambled out, departing at a flat footed run. Bracken gripped at the handle of the mahogany box, a little affair, a foot long and eight inches wide, and with an effort dislodged it. He lost his balance and came to one knee in the loose sand. The box, about six inches deep, seemed heavy as lead.

"Give us a hand, Irwin," he said, heaving it up.

I leaned over and took it from him. The box was, indeed, of extraordinary weight; there were other things than pearls in it. Necessarily, I clutched it in both hands as I stepped back from the hole.

And at this instant things happened.

I had a brief glimpse of a moving figure, of a flash of steel in the sunlight; then I reeled and sank down under a terrific blow in the back of the head. Freed must have moved with superhuman rapidity. He had cut the bonds of Shimoku, leaving the knife in those yellow fingers, then had snatched up the spade and lashed a blow at me. And he had got me, no doubt about that. Probably he had meant to avoid any sound of shooting.

For a few seconds, no more, I was knocked out, then dazedly wakened to find myself clutching at the nearby palm trunk, holding myself there half erect. Blood was hot on my neck; my skull was afire. Freed, a hazy, wavering figure, had snatched up the mahogany box and passed out of my vague vision. The trees danced—I could not focus my gaze on anything—and yet I was aware of something horrible and frightful close at hand.

Then I saw it more plainly, realized that Freed had departed, running, on the trail of Laverne. This did not matter; nothing mattered except the awful scene below me. Shimoku stood there above the body of Bracken, red streaming knife in hand. He had just arisen and was shaking his weapon as he poured a hot stream of abuse upon the dead man. Poor Bracken was dead—the back of his white jacket was all scarlet where Shimoku had plunged the knife into him again and again in a frenzy of murderous rage.

A choked cry broke from my lips. Shimoku heard it and whirled, staring up at me; I shall never forget the sight of his face, for it was contorted with passion, and he was actually foaming at the lips. He had forgotten all about me, or had thought me finished.

The sound of a shot plunged heavily upon the silence, jarring me. Shimoku caught at his breast, snarled something at me, then his knees gave way and he fell backward and rolled on top of Bracken. He lay head down in the hole and I knew that he was dead, quite dead. But it was a long moment before I knew who had shot him—before I found my hot pistol in my own hand and my trembling fingers shoved it back into my pocket.

I was hurt, no doubt about that, and the strength was going out of me. I slid down until I was sitting there, leaning back against the tree bole, and explored my hurt. The spade had struck me glancingly, cutting a bad gash, and I was thankful to feel the bump that was already egg shaped, splitting my hurt scalp; it meant that there was probably no

fracture underneath. I got out my knife and split up my jacket and shirt, and made a bandage which was rough but promised to serve the purpose. Then I sat back, weak and sick, resting.

A shot, then another, broke in upon me, but very dimly; nothing mattered. They were faint and at some distance. I did not care what had become of any one else, or what became of me, at the moment. I closed my eyes, everything reeled dizzily and I was gone.

When I came to myself, a deluge of wind and rain was bursting over me. I looked around; the world was strange, and no wonder. The sun was still shining, yet the trees were bending in a smother of wind and spray, rain was coming down by the bucket. The squall had broken. As I sat there a tremendous detonation split the earth and heavens wide open, and everything was a white flare of lightning that played all around. The very air was filled with it; the glare lingered a full five seconds, until it seemed that the whole world was afire, and I felt the electric shock of it in the water filled atmosphere. That shock jarred me awake, and when the glare passed, I was on my feet, clinging to the tree, staring around.

Some time must have passed, for the two bodies in the hole below were now half covered with sand washed down by the torrential rain. As I stood there the wind suddenly ceased and was gone. A moment later the rain lessened and went driving away; but the sun passed also, and I looked up to see that the onsweeping masses of cloud had covered it from sight. It was hotter than ever; there was no letup from the oppressive atmosphere, in which one could hardly breathe.

Suddenly I wakened. Where was Laverne? What would become of us all? Steve was no doubt standing out to meet us or pick us up, if he had been able to get the schooner safely out of harbor. With this thought plucking at me, I turned and, at the edge of the clearing, was able to pick up the tracks of Laverne and Freed, going into the brush.

I followed them as fast as I could make it, which was none too rapidly. The rain had done me worlds of good, however, and except for a mighty tender head I was pretty well myself again. Bracken's murder had hit me very hard, and as I went along I cursed Freed savagely. It was all his doing, of course. He and Halvers had cooked it up between them and from their point of view they had turned a very neat job, a damnable job.

I stumbled along through the heavy brush, without any sight of what lay ahead, intent only upon following those tracks, which the brush protected from wind and rain. The sun came out for a fitful moment, then was gone again. There was a wild rush of wind, but that died out almost instantly; another vivid glare of lightning filled the whole sky—there was no flash to this lightning, no direct point to it. It seemed to be everywhere like a vast explosion rather than a shooting spurt of electricity; there was no thunderbolt at all.

THE WESTERN sky and zenith were black now, and across the blackness ran masses of snow white cloud—a most curious effect, with occasional detonations and vivid electrical displays drowning everything in liquid fire. Amid one of those terrifying displays I found myself in thinner brush, and came out abruptly on to the beach where we had landed. I stopped short and stood blinking around.

Our own whaleboat was afloat, twenty feet from the shore—lifted and floated off by the rising tide. The smaller skiff with outboard motor was gone completely; she was not in sight, but thanks to the obscured sun and the blackened heavens, the horizon was so lowered that I could not have seen her half a mile distant. No craft whatever was in sight except the rocking whaleboat. It was not hard to conjecture that Freed and Halvers had made off in the skiff, whose motor assured them of moving through the calm and squalls alike. At the present moment a

dead calm had fallen, though overhead the white scud moved rapidly.

Closer to hand, I gained fresh testimony as to the sort of men who had pulled this job. The two Jap seamen lay to one side on the sand, as I had last seen them; but now they were dead—each of them deliberately pistoled through the head. Halvers had done this, of course; we had heard the two shots as he murdered them. It was a wanton bit of cruelty, a deed which showed the rat-like nature of the little beast.

Almost beside me, and at the edge of the brush, lay Laverne, face down. Over the side of his face and the shoulder of his jacket was a splotch of rain washed scarlet, but I could not take time now to see whether or not he were dead. He had been struck down as he emerged from the brush. No doubt Halvers had been waiting there to catch him from behind as he passed.

I stumbled forward to the beach and flung myself into the water, desperate and panic stricken by the situation.

It was no trick at all to swim out to the craft, but getting aboard was impossible for me. I was too weak to manage it. However, a line was hanging over her bow, and I got hold of this and towed her in until I could stand on bottom; and the rest was simple enough. I pulled her up as far as possible, then went staggering up the beach toward Laverne, with no hope of finding any life in him.

When I was within a yard of him I saw his body heave over; then he sat up and blinked at me. I sank down in the wet sand and broke into laughter—insane, horrible laughter. The very sound of it must have pierced through him, for a wild look came into his face and he reached forward, gripping my ankle.

"Stop it, you fool—stop it!" he cried out. "Blast it, where's Bracken?"

"Dead," I told him. "Aye, and buried by this time; and Shimoku along with him. Where are you hurt?"

He did not answer me, but came erect, snapped out an oath, put his hand to his head, then strode down to the whaleboat. He had stowed provisions aboard her, it appeared, for he came back with a bottle of cognac, knocked off the neck neatly and swallowed some. He held it down to me and I gulped the liquid fire. It brought me around almost at once.

I think Laverne had been much under the influence of Bracken—perhaps unconsciously patterning on the older man, the gentleman. At all events, he was abruptly changed, and much for the worse, as we sat here discussing the situation; now the old Lew Steele shone out of his savage, bloodshot eyes, and his cool poise was lost in a flood of snarling hot oaths.

"D'you think Freed and Halvers made the schooner?" I asked, as he stared out at the dark horizon.

He nodded.

"Yes. Those damned rogues weren't made to be drowned. That skiff was fast, and by this time they're safe aboard her."

"They they've killed Steve, eh?"

He laughed grimly.

"Not a chance. Could two of 'em work ship in this weather? Not much, my lad. Hm! Steve's a good sort; he'll not quit on us. He'll not let 'em get clear, never fear! Ten to one he's got the engines disabled, hoping for a chance to get back here. They'll have to depend on canvas—and there's a long lee shore of reefs about here. Let's get to work, Irwin."

He rose, stretched his huge frame and looked up. Rain, sweeping across the water, had blotted out the horizon to the south, though not a breath stirred here, nor a drop of rain; but now, without warning, sea and sand and brush seemed wrapped in a terrific veil of fire, and the crash was ear splitting. It brought me to my feet, trembling, but Laverne shook himself like a great dog and turned to the whaleboat, which was a third filled with rain water.

"Catch hold," he said.

I joined him and, pulling her around, we dumped her over, then back. Laverne got into the stern locker, which was dry,

and jerked out a cloth, which he gave me together with his pistol.

"Dry and clean 'em, yours and mine," he said. "And one of the rifles. Let the others be."

I fell to work, while he examined the whaleboat and her regulation stores, which were all aboard; so were some cabin stores he had stowed away the previous night. We got her into the water and then stood clinging to the gunwale, panting. The effort had hurt us both cruelly, but when I spoke of looking after him, Laverne only grunted and felt of his head.

"Leave be," he said. "Something hit me. I heard a shot as I went down. Glancing shot that scraped my skull and bounced off; nothing to speak of. The fools thought I was dead, and they'll find out different."

"But you're not setting out in this boat?" I demanded. "In this storm?"

His eyes narrowed savagely upon me.

"Storm? Call this a storm?" he said, and followed it with a disgusted oath. "Nothin' but a few squalls and a lightning show. If you were in the Mozambique channel, you'd see this sort o' thing every day regular, and a real storm to boot! Storm—my eye! Here, have a dry cigaret and I'll stow 'em away with the guns; we'll catch a lot o' water out yonder. Bailer handy? Aye."

As he spoke he gave me a cigaret, lighted it and his own, and put the rest of the packet away in the stern locker with the two pistols. Over us hung a dead, ominous silence, but I caught a thin whistling away somewhere up in the sky.

"But," I objected, "surely we can't hope to find the schooner—and it's safe here—"

"Safe hell, you fool!" snapped Laverne, exploding. "How long 'fore them Japs will be comin' over to look up their boss, eh? I know 'em. All we'd catch is bullets and no questions asked. As for findin' the schooner, leave that to me. If you're scared, stay here and be damned."

"Scared!" I said. "Of course I'm scared; but be damned to yourself, you big stiff! I'll go anywhere you'll go, squall or no squall."

He grinned at that and then fell sober.

"Good man," he said quietly. "I was tryin' to stir you up a bit, get me? We got no chance here at all, not a chance. We got a slim chance to ride through the weather yonder, and a slimmer one of findin' the schooner—and if we miss, we can haul up for the group to the north'ard, by night. We shan't starve, and we got a breaker o' water. Ready? We'll have wind in a minute—"

We got the whaleboat out, shipped the rudder and tiller, lashed the oars in place, and two minutes later were scudding seaward amid a wild smothering welter of foam, rain and wind that hit us like a solid wall.

AS YOU very likely know, handling a whaleboat under sail is an extremely ticklish business at the best of times, particularly before the wind; handling her as we did, amid puffs and squalls from all directions, in a sea that was rapidly rising, called for a skill and address which was, to me, superhuman.

Laverne managed it, and so adroitly that we scarce took a drop of water, except from the rain that beat down in sheets from time to time. This kept me hard at work bailing, and I kept lookout as well, for Laverne had no time to star gaze. Once, indeed, I thought we were done for, when in the middle of a rain squall an electrical discharge opened up and we were bathed in liquid fire and stinging needles.

But we kept the sea, now in sunlight, now in smothering foam, now in wild swooping squalls or spells of dead calm; it was the maddest sea and weather I ever hope to see. Hour upon hour slipped past with Laverne sitting like a rock over the tiller with hardly a word out of him all the time.

At the moment it seemed like stark insanity, for our horizon was lowered to very little, and after the first squall I never so much as caught sight of the

hummock or the island itself. Yet Laverne never hesitated, was never at a loss. He was gambling everything, of course, on his faith that Steve would disable the engines of the *Wastrel* and thus force Freed to depend on sail alone. Given this premise, Laverne, who knew his vessel intimately, could pretty well figure out what she would be forced to do, in order to avoid striking the long line of reefs to the east and northward. Yet to me it seemed that we were going nowhere, were merely indulging in a wild and aimless quartering of the yeasty waters.

Neither of us were in very good shape; my head ached intolerably, though the swelling gradually went down, and mentally we were both unstrung by the murder of Bracken. I never once thought about the box of pearls, except to hope that its weight had drowned Freed; and to give him his due, I think Laverne had forgotten about it also. Once or twice the wind carried me a drift of hot curses, and I knew the thought of Bracken was burning at him. What would happen if by some miracle we did pick up the schooner, never crossed my mind. I was miserable.

Hour after hour—and then, before I realized it, we were heeling over to a spanking, steady breeze, and the western sky showed blue, then gold. The sun streamed out across a maze of tossing, white crested seas, with warmth. Laverne's hard lips cracked in a smile, and he rubbed the salt out of his eyes.

"Weathered it, my bully, weathered it!" he exclaimed. "Now take a look as we rise; but I think we've worked too far to the east'ard."

Wherever we had worked, there was not a scrap of anything in sight as the horizon lifted and we ploughed up to the crest of every sea. The dark masses broke up into fleecy white clouds streaming away, and the hot sun dried us out and whitened the brine upon our skin; and Laverne, fishing out the boat's compass, whistled over it and set a course. He caught my skeptical look and chuckled.

"Don't believe it, eh? Well, I'm none too sure myself—but there's nothing like luck and brains to depend on! And I know old Steve pretty well, aye, that I do! We'll see. Now let's have a bite and a sup, eh?'

Food made a wonderful difference in everything, but we went easy on it; as Laverne said, we might be at sea for a week or two, and couldn't take chances. Our brief meal finished, I took the tiller and he crawled forward and dropped asleep; I was pretty done up, but stuck to it until hard on sunset, when I thought I could make out a speck to the north. My call got him up in no time and he took a long look.

"Smoke smudge," he declared finally. "That's the blessed tinpot, out looking for us. Fat chance! Well, that proves I'm right, Irwin. We're headed right. She's off to the east'ard of the island. We've run far south and haven't picked up the schooner, so most like she's worked around to the west'ard. We'll pick her up tonight or tomorrow, sure."

"Eh?" I stared hard at him, wondering at his confident manner. "What makes you so all fired certain, man? Freed wouldn't hang around these parts. He'd cut for distance the first thing."

"Freed be damned!" said Laverne joyously. "He's no seaman, and Steve is. They won't dare murder Steve, I tell you! They'll need him, and need him bad. And Steve will keep the *Wastrel* close by if he has to chop down her top hamper! But he'll not."

"Oh!" I said. "You mean—navigation, eh? That's why they'd need Steve?"

He shrugged.

"That's one reason, aye. And Steve, d'ye mind, is no fool. He's a sharp beggar if there ever was one, that Steve is!"

"Well," I returned, "we're not even sure that Steve picked up their boat."

"We're sure of nothing, and that's the gamble." Laverne laughed, his old ringing, deep throated laugh, but there was no laughter in his grim eyes. "What's the good in life that's all certainty? Devil a bit. We're born to die, born to lose, with the odds all against us, and

nothing certain except that maybe we can slug fate under the jaw and get an even break. And, lad, ain't there a glorious feeling to it when we do just that!"

"What about God?" I asked.

He gave me a curious, almost wondering look.

"I dunno," he said, and shrugged again. "God's what man makes Him, I've found; He don't bother us much. I'm no frog, to be creeping into some damned church and prayin'. I do my prayin' with brain and muscle, get me? And whatever God there is, He lends a hand if He feels like it."

"God helps those who help themselves, eh?"

"That's me," said Laverne with a nod. "Now you crawl up under them thwarts and get some sleep, so's you can spell me later. You look dead beat. Don't get too far for'ard, either; where the tarp is spread, get me? She's better trimmed that way, and I want to get some speed out of her. God, if I could only come in on them two lousy sons o' dogs before daybreak!"

There was a prayer, despite his recent words, and I smiled to myself as I crawled forward and stretched my cramped legs beneath the thwarts. Whether he knew it or not, Laverne could pray; and somehow I found his intense self-confidence contagious. From any sane and logical standpoint our situation seemed utterly mad, yet I dropped off to sleep with Laverne's laugh ringing again in my ears. Like most seamen, he hated the sea and joyed in beating her; and he knew his business. We were not whipped yet.

When I wakened the stars were out and spray was in my face; we were soughing along steadily, with the black figure of Laverne cramped over the tiller. I lay quiet, waiting; had he called me? No sound came from him, but, after a moment, I caught a slight vibration, felt rather than heard.

"What's that?" I demanded, struggling up. "Did you hear something?"

"Aye," came his voice, thrilling and vibrant. "You likely caught it clearer where you lay. A gun?"

"Sure, a gun—that's what it was!" I exclaimed. "Our gun on the schooner?"

"Most likely," said he. "It's about midnight. You might spell me a bit. Know the stars, do you? Come here and line 'em up and hold her steady as she is. Call me in a couple hours, if nothing else shows up."

IT WAS vain to seek anything on the starlit ocean; there was no flash of light, nothing to give us any further hint, nor did we hear the gun again. Yet the very sound showed us that something was or had been happening there beyond our ken.

To the tune of this spurring realization I took the tiller and held her steadily driving forward, laboring up the seas and hissing down them again, monotonously yet with eternal vigilance required at the tiller. There was an abnormal amount of phosphorescence in the water that night; every wave crest was alight with white fires, and our wake left a track that I could follow out of sight.

So an hour passed and another, as nearly as I could judge without timepiece or sun. I was about to call Laverne when, from the corner of my eye, I saw a star wink and go out, and wink again; a low star upon the horizon. I looked at it and saw nothing—looked away and saw it wink anew.

"Laverne!" I called. "Hi, Lew! Lew Steele!"

That got him up, with an oath and a laugh as he comprehended where he was.

"What makes a star wink when you look away from it, and show nothing when you look at it?" I asked, pointing.

"I dunno," he said. "They do that sometimes. Funny what you can see when you ain't looking direct at a thing—my good Lord! That's no star, mister! That's Steve makin' some signal, or I'm a Dutchman! Here, gimme that tiller. Now, by glory, we'll see something!"

He took my place excitedly, shifted the

helm a bit, ordered me to break out grub and a dram of liquor.

"No need o' starvation rations now!" he went on eagerly. "What you and me want is fighting food, get me? Look at her, would you? Ain't more'n three mile off; that's the horizon limit for a boat. Six mile from a ship's deck. My Lord, she ain't more'n a couple mile from here, Irwin. It's a light winking as she rolls, get me?"

"That's funny," I said, pausing in my work. "Look off to starboard. See it? Looks like a black mass or a small island—but it couldn't be that—"

Starlight is deceptive, particularly starlight at sea, with phosphorescence glinting in the water; it is hard to coordinate eyesight and brain realization. Even Laverne looked for a long while at the dark spot off to starboard, and then, just as he started to speak, we heard a voice, a thrill, thin voice that seemed to be hailing us.

"By glory!" exclaimed Laverne, with a jump. "It can't be—but it is, by glory! Wreckage afloat, and two boats. Quick, now! Out wi' the sheet; out with it! Climb up to wind'ard there and hang on—"

With a hiss and a rush we slewed more before the wind and went away from there fast, losing sight of the dark mass almost at once. Laverne was quivering with excitement.

"Know what that was, Irwin? Know who that was, eh? Shimoku's voice, the damned little yellowbelly! I've heard it 'fore now, more'n once, and that there was Shimoku himself. He was after us all right, knew where we were bound for, blast him! That explains the gun we heard awhile ago, remember? Freed slapped a couple shells into him, blew his cursed old maggoty lugger out o' the water! Now she's gone down and he's there with a boat or two. Wish he was dead as a doorbell in hell, I do! Like to have emptied that rifle into him, but it wouldn't do. Might give us away and, by glory, we're going to come up wi' the *Wastrel* 'fore dawn! Somethin' wrong with her or she wouldn't be rollin' like that."

We wolfed down some grub, swigged at the cognac, took a good drink each of the precious water—now, it seemed, no longer so precious. Even I could see now that the winking star was in reality a light, fallen below the horizon with our approach, which came and went with the uneven regularity of the rising seas. Then, far off to starboard, a thin stream of light lifted into the zenith, fell, rose again. Laverne saw it and laughed curtly.

"The Japs on Nanmuk, d'ye see? Or, likely, on that tinpot steamer. Perhaps heard the gun; makin' searchlight signals. Take the tiller; let's see what we got ahead here."

He balanced himself on the midships thwart, staring long and fixedly toward the swinging light for which we were hurtling through the water. Then he dropped back, cursing floridly.

"Hell of a mess! Looks like she's dismasted. Near's I can tell that's the answer—prob'ly the lousy scuts let her get caught in a squall. No, by glory! More like, Steve done it, a-purpose!" Eagerness thrilled in his voice and he suddenly clapped me on the knee. "D'ye see, Irwin? Ain't that what I said, eh? Steve had the helm and let a squall take her aback, most likely ripped the sticks out of her. And like I said, he's got her engines disabled. That's Steve all over—sooner go to hell than let them two dogs get away with their play. And he's down below, prob'ly in his cabin, showin' a light they wouldn't know or guess about."

He got out the two pistols and shoved one at me, with a couple of spare clips, loaded. And when he laughed, it was with a fierce and angry note that boded ill for Freed and Halvers.

LATER on we discovered that Laverne's conjectures were correct, almost to a dot. They were verified close enough, for that matter, when we crept up on the rolling *Wastrel* and found that she was stripped clean as a bone of all her gear,

except for the stump of her foremast. Nor was there any sign of wreckage in sight.

After the squall that stripped her, as it proved, they had sense enough to cut the wreckage adrift but make fast a line, riding to this sea anchor through all the rest of the blow. Then, with darkness, Steve had cut it adrift. Angered, Freed had knocked him in the head while Halvers held a gun on him, and they locked him below, forward. This had not prevented Sooey from obeying orders, however, and showing a light. As we drew up on her, Laverne laughed softly.

"That light's in Bracken's cabin, starboard side, d'ye see?" he exclaimed. "And they've got the engine room hatch off and are at work. Catch the glow above her deck as she rolls? Listen to 'em, now, by glory; they got it started!"

Indeed, we heard the sharp staccato noise of her engine for a moment, then it ceased. We were heading in beneath her counter, and Laverne touched my arm.

"Let go all! To hell wi' the whaleboat! We daren't risk losing our game by tryin' to hang on to her. Fend off with an oar as we drift in, and watch out for the roll, mind! Take it on the jump and never mind me. I'll be along."

Both of us had forgotten all about our hurt heads, or had become so used to the dull throb that it mattered nothing.

Laverne guided the boat with cunning hand. The seas were no longer high, but the *Wastrel* was in the trough, and had a nasty roll—so much of a roll that there was no trouble in catching the rail as she came down, but it took great nicety not to get ourselves crushed. I waited until Laverne gave me the word, then jumped, and made it.

As she came up, I scrambled inboard with the long, slow heave, and was over. Then, clinging to the rail, I waited, saw Laverne dimly below me as we came down, saw him make the leap—and miss clean. The whaleboat was smashed in and under the schooner's side.

Laverne had missed, but I had not; my right hand got him by the jacket collar, and he reached up, getting an iron grip on my shoulder as the hull heaved up. Next moment we were on the deck together in a tangled mass, and I heard him laugh under his breath. It had been a near thing and he enjoyed it with vibrant, eager gusto.

"Strike me pink if it ain't a bleedin' wyste o' time, and I'm done, I am!"

The whining, shrill voice of Halvers came to us, and Laverne's hand pressed me down. We lay in the starboard scuppers, amidships, amid a tangled mass of lines. The voice came from across the deck, and with the roll, we could see the figure of Halvers there, outlined blackly against the stars.

"By God, I'll burn Steve's feet till he puts it right!" came Freed's angry roar. He, too, rose opposite us, and again Laverne's hand enjoined quiet. "I said all the while it was that son of a dog that put them engines on the bum—and he's goin' to fix 'em up *prontol*"

"Leave 'im be till morning," said Halvers. "I'm fair set on havin' a look into that there box, matey. We've settled that 'ere ruddy Jap and all's clear, so let's into 'er and see wot them jewels is like. A bit of a drink wouldn't be 'arf bad, neither. Wot say?"

"You're on," rejoined Freed. "Get a bottle and fetch it down to the cabin, and we'll have a look at the plunder. Then we'll get some sleep till sunup."

They moved aft, on the port side.

We lay quiet, and a grim exultation filled me; we had them now, and no mistake about it—had the pair of them under our hands! But it was Laverne's game; he had fairly won the right to play it out, and I was only too glad to let him have the playing. There would be no mercy for those murderers whose cold deviltry had left Bracken there in his grave.

"Easy, now," muttered Laverne in my ear. "Watch the cabin skylight. She's open."

I assented, as we cautiously sat up and waited. Presently we saw a glow of light fill the skylight, aft; evidently Freed had never a thought that it might lead to any possible danger thus to show lights. Nor,

at the moment, did it occur to us that this light might draw foes, for the sea was vast and dark; and our minds were entirely on the two men below.

Laverne and I crept aft. The cabin skylight was partly open, and as we crouched there we could see the top of Halver's red head, for he sat at the table facing us; we could not see the table itself, or Freed.

"Ah-h!" came Freed's voice. "A good drink like that perks you up, eh? Want to look in on Steve and see is he dead?"

"To 'ell wiv 'im," whined Halvers excitedly. "Let's be at the bleedin' box. Where's that 'ere chisel I 'ad?"

Laverne touched my arm, drew me back a little, put his lips to my ear.

"Wait here," he said. "I'm going to look up Steve. He'll want to be in on the fun, d'ye see? Probably up for'ard. No hurry. Dawn's at hand; we can see better by daylight."

"Right," I said, and he stole away.

I returned to my station, intent upon the scene below, what I could see of it. I felt a murderous itch to be at those two rogues, but Laverne was showing sound sense in getting hold of Steve. And, as he had said, there was no hurry—or we thought there was none. So I settled in place again, bracing myself against the steady roll of the schooner.

Sounds of rending wood, triumphant oaths, followed by a sudden startled silence and a gasp from Halvers.

"My eye! Gold sovereigns, strike me ruddy pink if they ain't!"

"Huh!" exclaimed Freed excitedly. "That ain't no fortune, you red headed fool. Here, what's this here drawer? Thought so. Cotton, huh? If we—oh. my gosh! Would you look at 'em!"

Another silence, then a long whistle.

"I say!" whined Halvers shrilly. "Are they real, matey? Strike me if they don't look like the pearls in the sixpenny store! Let's see 'ow many—"

"Hands off!" snarled Freed. "Go easy, now, will you? Yeah, they're real, all right. I guess that slob Irwin 'd stick his eyes out if he could see these, huh? Blast him, I wish I'd hit him twice as hard! There, you count that side. Mind you don't stick your black nails in 'em, either. Pearls are mighty soft."

Now a mumble of counting, and I grinned to myself. Freed might well wish he'd hit me harder, especially if I got my hands on him.

"Thirty-two 'ere," said Halvers.

"And one makes twenty-nine," said Freed. "Sixty-one of the beauties! Lord, would you look at 'em! Ain't they soft and glowing, Red? Turn up that light a bit. Tell you what I'll do, just to be a good sport. I'll give you the gold and I'll take the pearls."

"Huh? Like 'ell you will!" Halvers' voice was hot with excitement. "We'll divide 'em even, that's wot! See 'ere—I'll match you for the odd, matey. Take a sov—'ere you are."

A dull click of gold, and Halvers laughed eagerly.

"Thirty-one for me, thirty for you, matey! Sink me if they ain't different colors, too!"

"Sure," said Freed. "White are the best. Them pink and grays ain't worth near so much. Tell you what, Red—you been a good sport, you have. I'll treat you right. You pick out the white ones. and I'll take the colored ones—hey! What you lookin' at?"

I drew back hurriedly, for Halvers had glanced upward.

"Nothing," came his whine. "Bli'me, matey, it give me a turn, it did that! Looked like the face o' that 'ere bleedin' Irwin, it did!"

A chair scraped back, and I heard Freed cursing.

I GOT off the skylight and stood up, hesitant. They would certainly come up to take a look around, then Freed would call Halvers a fool for his pains, and they would turn in for some sleep. But I must not stay here. Laverne was somewhere forward.

I started forward along the starboard rail, feeling my way to avoid the lines

that cumbered the deck. As the schooner rolled, something rumbled in the scuppers and smashed against my ankle, bringing me to my knees, gripping at the rail and cursing under my breath. I felt to see what it was and discovered a three-pounder shell—probably brought on deck to be used in the gun aft, and then forgotten and left to trundle in the scuppers.

And, as I made this discovery, I perceived something else, something below me in the dark water, something which for an instant left me starkly paralyzed with terror and realization. A boat was down there under the ship's rail, and the faces of men, half a dozen of them, were looking upward in the starlight.

It came to me in a flash—the wreckage, the two boats, the voice of Shimoku calling. If we had found the *Wastrel*, thanks to that swinging light, they had done so likewise. And if those Japs got aboard here—

Quick as thought, I stooped over and lifted the shell with the down roll of the ship. Below was the black shape, with streaks of phosphorescent fire out in the water; gray dawn was coming into the sky, I realized, as I hurled the shell straight down.

It went through that boat like a streak, went through with a rending smash of planking. A man's scream, wild and terrific, pierced up at me; then pandemonium cut loose.

I had forgotten that we had seen two boats with the wreckage. And the second boat had already sent her men aboard, on the port side, with Shimoku at their head.

Only the sheerest of good fortune saved me in this instant. I started to leap forward, caught my foot in the bight of a line and plunged headfirst along the deck by the coaming of the engine room hatch, my foot still entangled in the line. I twisted around to free myself, then relaxed and stayed where I was.

Shrill voices had leaped out from across the deck, mingling with the screams and wild cries of the men in the sunken boat alongside. A pencil of light streaked out, the light of an electric torch stabbing aft. This little shaft of light struck full upon the figure of Halvers, gaping, open mouthed, pistol in hand, as he leaped from the companionway and then straightened up.

A pistol shot smashed out, then two or three more almost together. I saw Halvers turn around as though some one had spun him about, fling out his arms and pitch into the scuppers. Then a roar of fury—Freed's voice—and the sharp barking of a pistol fired as rapidly as it could be worked. The streak of light vanished abruptly, and the wail of a man's shriek arose, punctuated by more reports.

Shimoku's voice lifted. I recognized it at once, among all the others, as the one we had heard from the wreckage. That voice held a tigerish, inhuman quality, like no other I ever heard; small wonder Laverne had recognized it. A man came running, then plumped down full upon me and squeaked out with shrill panic as he went down. I gripped him and smashed his head into the deck, and he fought me savagely, until I got a lift to him and whanged down his head against the solid edge of the hatchway; at this he went limp and was out of the fight.

I rose, pistol in hand, and stood waiting. Insensibly, the dawn had begun to break, and I could dimly make out moving objects. Pistols were cracking and men shouting, and I heard Freed's wild roar from aft, where there was a whirling commotion of figures. Then a new note, a new voice that thrilled me—and with a bellow Laverne was somewhere in the middle of it all. I could not distinguish him, but I could hear his curses as he fought.

Almost beside me, a dripping figure uprose—one of the men from the sunken boat, who had clambered aboard by teeth and toenails. I turned to him, and a pistol belched at me from one side, as a second man ran in upon me from across the deck. With this I more than had my hands full.

The dripping figure plunged at me, gripped me as my gun exploded, sent me down to the deck, and both of them were

on me now. I shot, and shot again, wildly. One of them fell away, his feet kicking at us as he died, but the other had me by the throat, clinging desperately, clawing at me with frantic fingers, In vain I hammered at him with fists and gun butt; we rolled over and over, landed in the scuppers—

And I was uppermost!

Ten seconds later I scrambled to my feet, and a terrible spectacle confronted me. There beside the skylight, caught in the light from below, was Freed, towering over three little brown men. One he held in both hands, a limp rag of flesh; the other two were clinging to him, knives stabbing into him and out again. Blood was spurting from him as I looked. I flung up the gun in my hand and fired, and one of them fell away; then Freed reached around with one hand, gripped the other knife man by the neck and took two plunging steps foreward. I heard his wild, hearty animal laugh for the last time, as with the downward roll and lurch of the hulk, he went over the rail, still gripping fast to his two victims.

So Freed paid for his sins.

Of what followed I have no very clear memory, except in one thing. Steve went darting past me, blood over his face; the two of us mixed into the mêlée, and that ended the fight. Squealing, shrieking out at this unexpected assault from behind, Shimoku's men broke; they went overside to regain the boat dragging there. Presently, except for those who would never move again, they were gone. All of them, that is, except Shimoku himself.

In the growing light the figures stood out clearly enough, there in the stern beside the mounted gun. They were fighting furiously, the two of them; Shimoku with a knife, Laverne empty handed, gripping the knife wrist with his left, driving in blows with his right. He was naked to the waist, and crimsoned. I took a step forward, but Steve, panting, caught me and shoved me back, and growled something I did not get. And then the spell of it enthralled me and held me motionless.

This Shimoku was very wide in the shoulder, large for one of his race; he was putting up a terrific fight. His free hand jabbed into Laverne again and again, until Laverne bellowed with rage and pain—cunning, swift ju-jutsu blows. Suddenly Shimoku stooped, heaved, pulled Laverne over his shoulders, but Laverne's grip held. They went down together, rolled to the rail and the knife tinkled on the deck.

Then, as they came up, Laverne's fists hammered in. *Thwack-thwack!* He beat at Shimoku, beat him back, but it was like hitting a rubber man. The Jap bent over, swooped aside, was clear of the rail—and snapped in a lightning palm edge to Laverne's neck. It was a cruel blow; I saw Laverne throw out his arms and stagger, and Shimoku launched himself full in the air, hurtled up in a leap to finish it.

He never finished it. Laverne whirled about, caught him in midair, and the two of them smashed against the rail. I heard the sound of it, just before Shimoku screamed out; one frightful, inhuman scream, as his back gave way and he doubled up across the rail. Then he was gone. Laverne was standing there, heaving, wiping blood from his eyes, laughing like a madman and cursing between his laughs.

That's the end of it. You can see the rest for yourself. Steve unplugging the gasoline feed line; the *Wastrel*, her fuel tanks still full, chugging her seven knots through the water, day after day, until we got a jury rig on her; pearls littering the cabin floor until we had time to pick them up—all of it. And Laverne is sitting beside me in a Sydney hotel while I write this, with Steve reading over the pages, and both of them admiring it all vastly—and what's money in the bank, after all?

Laverne says he knows a good thing up in the islands, a rich and racy thing that would just suit the three of us. It'd take a bit of money, but if we pulled off the job—well, why not? There *is* some fun in slugging destiny under the jaw and winning out.

TARGETS *by* J. D. NEWSOM

IT WAS half past six in the morning. A dingy gray light seeped through the windows of the mess hut where Kinkaird and Leath were finishing their breakfast. The yellow glow of two candle stumps glued to the lids of empty butter cans made the hut look bleaker and darker than it really was.

Kinkaird, who was suffering from a dismal hangover due to too many cognacs the night before at Madame Boudoin's, sat with his head between his fists, staring down without enthusiasm at a bowlful of porridge. Leath was shoveling strips of buttered toast into his mouth, while he studied a set of aerial photographs propped up against the sugar bowl, the tea pot and a can of condensed milk.

Outside the hut the voice of Sergeant-Major Cooley could be heard issuing blasphemous orders to the ground crew, which was raising the observation balloon from its bed.

"Look at the weather!" croaked Kinkaird. "It's going to be as clear as a bell. A beautiful spring day," he added disgustedly, "with just enough wind to make me sicker'n a dog. I'm sick right now."

Leath smothered a yawn.

"You do look rather moldy, old bean. If you really want to stay down, switch with Ballard. He's a good sportsman."

"Go to hell, will you?" grunted Kinkaird. "It's my turn—I'm going up." He ran his fingers through his tousled hair and gazed with bloodshot eyes at the tin roof. "Sick as I am, I'll go aloft," he declaimed. "I'll do my duty to his Majesty, King George the Fifth, his heirs and successors, and if I'm shot down in flames—"

He got no farther, for the door of the hut was thrown violently open by a tall, gaunt man dressed in a mud splashed uniform, who hurtled into the mess as though he had been shot out of a gun. Obviously, he was very mad. His eyes blazed, his lips were set in a thin, quivering line, and his unshaven jaw jutted forward truculently.

By way of introduction he flung his steel helmet, his stick and a map case on to the table, where they landed with a resounding crash. The helmet spun down the length of the table, caromed off Leath's maps and struck Kinkaird's porridge bowl. The bowl cracked open, and a flood of porridge poured off the oilcloth on to Kinkaird's thighs.

His own temper was none too good that morning. He let out a mighty howl.

"Hey! You lousy slob, what are you trying to do?"

He snatched up the helmet, but before he could heave it at its owner's head Leath caught hold of his wrist.

"I say, do be careful!" he remonstrated. "The chap's a jolly old captain. One cawn't throw things at a captain. It's awfully bad form, don't you know?"

"I was saving these pants to wear on leave—and now look at 'em!" wailed Kinkaird. "Say, what's the big idea?" he demanded, peering over the shimmering candle flames at the intruder. "These pants—"

"Confound your pants, sir!" boomed the captain. "Out there—" he pointed toward the open doorway— "out there men are wallowing up to their bellies in muck, while you sit here in a warm, dry hut, puling about your filthy pants. You're supposed to be a soldier, sir—an officer. What the devil do you think I care about your pants? I'm here on business."

"All right," promised Kinkaird. "I'll call on you one of these days and I'll bring along a bucket of sump oil just to show you *I* mean business."

"Hush!" counseled Leath. "I can see the pips on his shoulder straps. He's a *pukka* captain."

He pushed back his chair and stood up.

"Your helmet, I believe, sir," he said blandly, holding out the tin hat. "If there is anything else we can do for you in a business way, we shall be only too pleased to help you, what?"

He was a pink cheeked young man, with one of the most insulting smiles ever nurtured in an English public school.

Rumbles welled up in the captain's throat. He ignored the proffered helmet.

"I'm Captain Abbott of B Battery, Fifth Brigade, Australian Corps Artillery," he announced, shaking his head from side to side as he spoke. "My guns are down behind the Verbeeke farm. Eight-inch howitzers, if you want to know. Who's in command of this ruddy outfit?"

Leath beamed upon the enraged captain.

"I am in command of this—ah—ruddy outfit, sir. I am Lieutenant Leath. This is No. 7 Balloon Section. Of course, I remember now; we've been helping you register some targets during the past few days. Jolly old eight-inch hows', what? Won't you sit down and have some breakfast, sir, or perhaps you would prefer a whisky and soda?"

"You call yourself observers, do you?" rasped Abbott, planting his fists on his hips and sticking out his chin. "I'm a blunt, plain spoken man, and I'm here to tell you that you're the most inefficient bunch of cock eyed slackers I've ever bumped into. You've been 'elping me register some targets, 'ave you?" he exploded. "I'll bet ten quid to a threepenny bit you don't even know how to read a map!"

"Does porridge leave a stain?" Kinkaird inquired of the world at large. "I'm going to Paris in a couple of weeks, where

there ain't no eight-inch howitzers and a man can raise a thirst."

"I'd like to have you in my battery for a couple of weeks," roared the captain. "I'd put some ginger into you! I'd give you something to think about except Paris!"

"I'll bet you would," agreed Kinkaird. "Gee, it's great to meet a real soldier every so often."

Abbott, who appeared to enjoy doing that sort of thing, picked up his map case and slammed it down again with extreme and wholly uncalled for energy.

"Why don't you learn how to do your ruddy job properly?" he brayed. "There's a war on. It's time some of you fellows woke up and found out about it. What do you do when you're up in that sausage of yours—sleep?"

Kinkaird put down the spoon with which he had been scraping porridge off his trousers. He looked despairingly at Leath.

"What do you think he wants?" he inquired. "He's beginning to give me a pain in the neck."

"I rather fawncy he wishes to make a complaint," drawled Leath. "Won't you sit down, sir," he went on, turning to Abbott, "and tell us your troubles? If we can help you we shall be delighted to do so, I assure you. That's what we're here for, don't you know? Allow me to introduce Mr. Kinkaird—a jolly old American. Enlisted at the outbreak of war—"

"And I don't give a curse who he is," retorted Abbott. "I didn't come here at this hour of the morning to discuss the pedigrees of junior subalterns. I'm a plain spoken Australian, and I'm proud of it—and I can dispense with your haw-haw English airs. I'm here to tell you you don't know the first thing about your business. Is that straight-forward enough to sink into what you call a brain?"

"Quite," agreed Leath. "And now, if you don't mind getting down to facts, sir, instead of dealing in offensive personalities, I'm sure it will be to our mutual advantage."

"You want facts do you? I'll give you facts all right, you young jackass. With your cooperation for the past three days we've been trying to silence that battery of 5.9's in H.24.d—and we're still trying! Sixty rounds we put into 'em yesterday. You reported an O.K. on the eleventh shot; and then, strike me blind, if they didn't open up at two o'clock this morning as per usual and plaster my guns with everything they had."

He didn't throw anything this time. He merely shook his clenched fist at the two observers.

"And that's what you call efficient cooperation," he went on. "You're either blind or drunk. I'll bet a year's pay you haven't even located this Boche battery. I'll bet I'm dumping eight-inch shells into the middle of an empty field while you report direct hits. My dugout was blown in last night; that's the kind of shooting the Germans do! They've got trained men over yonder—not a bunch of little squirts who've never even seen the inside of a trench!"

"Listen here," observed Kinkaird, who had spent almost three years with the Canadian forces without acquiring any acute sense of discipline. "As man to man, if you didn't have three stars on your straps I'd pitch you out on your ear. Get that? I reported that O.K. yesterday, and it was an O.K. I can't help it if your gunners don't know how to lay out correct lines of fire. Most of your stuff was falling short and left. If I told you once I told you fifty times. And, anyway, that's one of the toughest targets I've ever tried to register. You know it, Leath; it's on the edge of the Zilvoorde Wood, tucked away behind the trees."

"Oh, you know that much, do you?" jeered Abbott. "Well, well! I'm surprised!"

"We're not in the habit of sending down false reports," Leath broke in. "Do you expect that battery to shut up shop and change its position simply because of one direct hit? Have you changed your position every time you've been shelled?

Kinkaird is right. It's a filthy target to locate. We can only spot the flashes. The guns are down behind the trees, and one cawn't see through a forest, not even with high powered glasses. It's a great pity, of course."

"Then how the devil do you know you scored a single O.K.?" demanded Abbott. "Guesswork, I suppose."

"Guesswork nothing!" retorted Kinkaird. "We hit an ammunition dump. It made one swell burst, take it from me. If you'd corrected your guns on that one shot as I told you to do we'd have blown the whole outfit off the map."

A dark flush crept into Abbott's cheeks.

"You insolent little puppy!" he spluttered. "How dare you tell me how to handle my guns!"

HE SPENT the next five minutes telling the observers exactly what he thought of them and their methods and their alleged morals. He was badly rattled. The German battery lurking somewhere in the zone known as H.24.d had become the bugbear of his existence. It simply refused to be put out of action. Every day his guns pounded away at the supposed emplacement, and every night the German battery retaliated by drenching his own gunpits with high explosives and gas.

He had to rely for his observation on the balloon corps, for the land in that sector, north of Armentieres, was as flat as a pancake. As far as he could judge, the balloon observers were absolutely incompetent, and it galled him to think that he was at the mercy of slackers who lived in ease and comfort while he wallowed in mud or took shelter in collapsing dugouts.

"Thank the Lord the Aussies are between us and the Krauts!" exclaimed Kinkaird when Abbott paused for breath. "I'm only beginning to realize what the war really means. It must be terrible!"

He had done his fair share of mud wallowing with the Canadian infantry, and had only transferred to the balloon corps after his left knee had been smashed, but he didn't dwell on the subject.

"Your cheap sarcasm—" Abbott began again, but Leath cut him short.

"If you have any complaints to make," he snapped, "may I suggest that you get in touch with corps headquarters?"

"Don't you worry about that," Abbott assured him. "I've been in touch with 'em. And I told 'em a thing or two! I'm through beefing about, depending upon your half baked reports. I'm going to do my own observing today!"

He tore open the flap of his breast pocket and drew out a slip of paper.

"There you are!" he announced. "When I want something I go out and get it. There's an authorization signed by your own colonel. I had to drag him out of bed to get it—but there it is, by cripes! I'm going up in that blasted balloon of yours. I'll show you a few things about gunnery that'll open your eyes, my lad."

Leath remained calm and unruffled.

"That's very fine." He smiled. "We shall be delighted to have you with us."

He ambled over to the window and looked out.

"They'll be ready for us in about five minutes. They're toggling on the basket. I think we might as well be on our way. We'll have to arrange for an extra parachute."

The idea made Abbott laugh heartily.

"You don't take any chances do you? Parachutes, my word! Safety first is your motto, I can see that!"

"It is," agreed Kinkaird, who had taken a violent dislike to the gunner and made no attempt to conceal his feelings. "Ever been up before?"

"I've had other things to do. I've been up front where parachutes wouldn't do you much good. I'll take a chance—"

"Either you put one on or you don't go up," Leath warned him, "and that is final. If you object you can ring up balloon headquarters and find out for yourself; no one is allowed up without a parachute."

Abbott gave his shoulders a slight shrug.

"That's all right, my lad," he said tolerantly. "I'll put one on if it'll make

you feel any better. I suppose I might as well leave my tin hat behind," he added. "It wouldn't be much good up in the air, ha-ha! You don't know how lucky you are."

He swaggered out of the hut ahead of the observers.

A faint mist, which the sun was fast dissolving, lay over the flat land. Driven by a gusty wind, fleecy white clouds sailed across the sky. In a nearby field a crew of fifty men were hanging on to the guy ropes of the balloon, which lolloped about, its ailerons rustling in the breeze like a playful elephant waggling gigantic ears. A few yards away, on the road, stood the motor truck on which the windlass bearing the steel cable was mounted.

Four troopers held the basket in place while the observers climbed in, and the thought flashed through Abbott's mind as he set foot on the wickerwork floor that it was singularly flimsy and fragile to sustain the weight of three full grown men. It creaked beneath his boots, and the breast high sides of the basket gave slightly beneath his hand.

His two companions had momentarily forgotten him. Leath was giving orders to a signaler squatting by the roadside beside a field telephone. Kinkaird was checking over the instruments and giving a last look around the rigging.

The most disturbing thing as far as Abbott was concerned was the stillness. Already, though the basket was still firmly on the ground, he felt cut off from his fellow men by an invisible barrier. The stolid faces of the ground crew seemed to be staring at him out of another world. Above him, shutting out the sky, the gas bag wobbled in the wind, its skin wrinkling and caving in in a most alarming manner.

He heard Leath give a low voiced order.

"Let up on the guy ropes," brayed the sergeant-major. " 'And over 'and!"

Abbott found himself looking down into upturned countenances.

"Section—stand clear!"

The earth fell away. There were no fond goodbys. Few of the men bothered to look up. Several of them standing about in small groups were lighting cigarets.

"Let up on the winch," droned Leath, speaking into the mouthpiece of the phone hanging on his chest.

Down below an engine throbbed. The figures on the ground became foreshortened and dwarfed. The horizon spread out as the balloon climbed skyward at the end of its steel cable—brown fields fringed with rows of slender poplars, red rooftops, a church spire . . .

A gust of wind made the basket swing crazily. Abbott clutched at the rigging, grabbing handfuls of cordage.

"Nice bracing sort of weather," commented Kinkaird, speaking out of the corner of his mouth.

The basket would not stay still. It swayed and rocked and yawed like a ship in a heavy sea, only more so. Beneath him, Abbott suddenly realized, there was nothing but the emptiest kind of empty space. His throat went dry as he watched the needle of the barometer creep upward from a hundred to two hundred, to three hundred feet.

"There's your battery position," said Leath, whose quiet voice was muffled by the enormous silence. "See it, over there behind the Verbeeke farm?"

A brick wall and a slate roof swam past Abbott's eyes. He caught a glimpse of some mounds standing in the midst of a strip of pockmarked soil. The balloon veered dizzily. He saw houses clustered about crossroads—a village—Nieppe, another village, Pont-de-Nieppe, then stretches of chocolate brown earth alternating with oblong patches of green and yellow. As the earth contracted beneath the climbing balloon the smashed rooftops and the narrow streets of Armentieres slid over the horizon. Beyond lay the trenches—so close that Abbott felt he could almost have spat down into them.

"Wind's up to twenty," grunted Kinkaird. "Wait till we reach five thousand; she'll blow out your back teeth."

BEADS of perspiration stood out in large, glistening drops on Abbott's forehead. He was just beginning to discover that he had a hitherto unsuspected aversion to height. It made him giddy and light headed. Whenever he looked over the edge of the basket he was filled with an overwhelming fear that he might fall out. In his mind's eye he saw himself spinning through space, going faster and ever faster. The canvas belt fastened around his chest and looped between his legs was absurdly weak; so was the cord attached to the parachute hanging in a case on the outside of the basket.

He recalled with astonishing lucidity every airplane and every balloon he had seen brought down in flames. Such incidents had never made much of an impression upon him. Now, however, it seemed as though he had seen literally hundreds of such accidents.

To make matters worse the motion of the basket was turning his stomach upside down. A film was gathering over his eyes and an iron band was clamped over his temples.

He heard Leath speaking into the telephone mouthpiece—

"Steady on the winch."

The nose of the balloon tilted earthward. The basket swung away beneath his feet. He was thrown heavily against Kinkaird.

"What?" he demanded, wide eyed with terror. "What's happened?"

"Up a thousand," explained Kinkaird. "We've stopped to valve out, that's all. Bit rough, ain't it?"

"Is—is it always like this?"

"Depends on the weather. She's bouncing about like a colt today. But the visibility's fine. Clear as a bell. A trained gunner like you ought to be able to see the rifling inside the barrels of those 5.9's behind the Zilvoorde Wood. Look over yonder—past Armentieres—see it? That's Lille."

Eastward, blurred by the dust haze, a sea of slate-gray roofs covered the land; roofs and church spires and railroad tracks.

"Roubaix, Tourcoing, Haubourdin," went on Kinkaird, pointing toward other sprawling cities. "They're all bunched together. Can't tell where one ends and the other begins."

"No," gulped Abbott. "Tell me; is that c-cable very strong?"

"Fair. A thirty-five mile wind's about as much as it'll stand. When you're pulling in the strain increases. Air resistance, you know. Sometimes a cable snaps and you go up like a rocket. We lost a couple of sausages that way on the Somme last summer. One of our own airplanes barged into the wire, the dumbbell! Tore off a wing and crashed. Mallard jumped clear, but Treadgold went on up. Got tangled in the rigging. Remember it, Leath? Treadgold drifting over Fricourt, hanging head downward and waving a handkerchief? Both sides potting at him for all they were worth."

Leath let go the valve cord.

"Let up on the winch," he ordered, speaking to the crew down below. "Tell B Battery, Fifth Brigade, to stand by for Captain Abbott's orders in another fifteen minutes. Then get A-149 and the twelve-inchers on the railroad siding. We'll start with those three."

The balloon climbed skyward again.

"Treadgold?" he went on. "Great pity losin' him. A fine chap. But that was no worse than what happened to Long."

"What became of him?" inquired Abbott.

"Oh, a bally Fokker set the balloon on fire. Long hopped out. It was in July—not a breath of air stirring. He came down as straight as a plumb line, and the damn balloon fell on top of his parachute; burned it up. He wasn't two hundred feet off the ground."

"We had bad luck up at Poperinghe too." Kinkaird nodded. "Carstairs flopped in Zillebeeke Lake, McGrath stopped an anti-aircraft shell and came down piecemeal, then Pelham—" He stared at Abbott with a wicked glimmer in his eye. "Know what became of Pelham? He came down in a stiff gale on the house-

tops of Pop. He was dragged all the way across town, banging up against the walls as he went. He was mush when we got to him."

The balloon was creeping up between four and five thousand feet. Down below the rim of the world was shrouded in a purplish haze. Southward shells were bursting around the black slag heaps of Lens, but no sound reached Abbott's ears except the silky rustle of the ailerons and the creak of the wicker floor heaving beneath his feet.

"I'm going to be sick," he gulped. "It's the motion."

"Not in the basket, sir, if you please," urged Leath.

"I can't—" began Abbott, but a firm hand caught him by the scruff of the neck and thrust his head over the side.

He closed his eyes and gave himself up noisily to the business of being sick.

"Now then, sir," Leath went on when the commotion subsided. "I'll point out your target to you and we'll get to work. Your battery is standing by."

Abbott wiped the tears out of his eyes. He tried to stop the spasmodic quivering of his jaw muscles. He couldn't help being sick—confound the luck!—but he'd show these upstart observers that they didn't know the first thing about gunnery.

With the aid of Leath's aerial photographs and of his own map he had no difficulty in locating the Zilvoorde Wood, a gray-black cluster of dead trees on the banks of a silvery stream. In the foreground he spotted the remains of a long, low building which corresponded to the details given on his map.

"That's the tannery," explained Leath. "Now behind the tannery on the far side of the wood you'll see the left hand gun pit. See that shadow? That's it."

But Abbott couldn't see the gunpit. The fringes of the wood were scarred with shell holes; the details of the landscape were too small—and the fiendish rocking of the basket kept him from bringing his binoculars to bear on the target for more than a fraction of a second at a time.

"I see what you mean," he said in desperation, "and you think that's a gun pit! Gun pit, my hat! I say the battery is right in the woods, under the trees. You can tell where the trees have been slashed."

Sweat rolled down his clammy cheeks as he spoke. Waves of nausea swept over him whenever he tried to focus his eyes on any given spot, but he refused to let the observers know how very badly he was feeling.

"I'll pass on your orders, sir," Leath told him. "I'm observing for the twelve-inchers outside Berquin. They're waiting."

"All set for A-149," announced Kinkaird, hunching himself halfway out of the basket. "Target in Don. 15. c . . . Fire when ready."

Leath relayed the information into the mouthpiece and added his own instructions for the twelve-inch guns.

"Tell B battery to let me have one ranging shot," ordered Abbott. "Right hand gun of No. 1 Section. Fire when ready."

Seconds later Leath reported—

"B Battery fired."

Abbott kept his eyes glued on the Zilvoorde Wood. The seconds dragged by. All at once a fountain of earth spouted out of the débris of the tannery.

"Three hundred short. Right for line," he called out. "Repeat! I knew damn well you were nowhere near—"

The words froze on his lips.

A dull report thudded against his ears, the first sound he had heard since leaving the ground. A moment later something came screaming out of space, straight at him. He knew that sound all too well—a shell!

CRASH! Two hundred yards away, on a line with the balloon, a great smudge of smoke appeared against the sky. He heard shrapnel hiss past the basket.

"Aiming at us?" he inquired.

Kinkaird nodded.

"Yep. It's a 9.2 naval on the Haubourdin siding. Determined sons of guns. They keep pegging away, and the trouble

is we can't retaliate. Can't shell Lille. Orders. Going to give 'em one more try, Leath. I want to see where that last round went. There she goes! A-149—two degrees more right. Same range. Fire when ready."

Abbott's heart was beating like a trip hammer against his ribs. He didn't mind being shot at when he was on the ground. It was bad enough, but he knew what to do. There were dugouts and shell holes and trenches one could flop into—but up here he felt naked and defenseless. It was a personal affair between him and the gunners of the 9.2 on the railroad siding at Haubourdin. They were aiming straight at *him*.

"Your battery is waiting," Leath said sharply. "Any orders, sir?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I didn't see that last shot. Tell 'em to repeat."

"B-5, repeat," droned Leath.

"Have they ever got you?" inquired Abbott, appealing to Kinkaird, who was watching for a shot to drop.

The latter spoke over his shoulder.

"Three weeks ago. Tore off an aileron. Dalton was up at the time. His parachute was torn to hell and gone—"

"B-5, fired!" Leath called out. "Target!"

Abbott tried to forget the 9.2 naval, but a cold chill ran up and down his spine as he raised his glasses to his eyes.

Dimly he saw a shell burst among the trees in the Zilvoorde Wood. Smoke leaked up through the branches. The wind flattened it out and swept it away.

"Add a hundred," he ordered at random. "Thirty minutes more right."

All at once Kinkaird let out a shout.

"Get me a battery, Leath! Quick! I've got a convoy on the Messine Road. Nearing the crossroads at D.10. I can give 'em half a minute."

Leath rapped out a string of orders while Kinkaird squirmed impatiently.

"All right," Leath reported. "I've got Lomax's six-inchers for you. They're all set."

"Ranging round on D.10. Fire when ready!"

"Fired!"

"Orders?" Leath went on, turning to Abbott. "Your battery is still waiting."

"How the hell can you handle ten different targets at once?" complained Abbott, wiping the sweat off his face. "This is a crazy way of doing things. Crazy! I've had enough of this, damn it! So far as I'm concerned you can haul in."

"Wow!" yelled Kinkaird. "Lomax is one good egg. Drop fifty— Parallel lines of fire . . . Battery fire five seconds interval, and let her ride. Boy!" He pounded the edge of the basket with his fist. "I got 'em!"

Bong! Again Abbott caught the echoing thud of the 9.2 on the Haubourdin siding. The shell came at him with a slithering rush, growing louder and louder, until it burst to the left of the balloon and a little beneath it. The explosion tossed the basket sidewise. Abbott's knees gave way. He sat down heavily, waiting dry mouthed to be catapulted into space.

But the rocking subsided. Somebody kicked him in the small of the back.

"For the love of Pete," yelled Kinkaird, "get out of my way, you great big he-man. That convoy's shot to hell. Hey, Jimmy, tell Lomax—switch to H.E. instead of shrapnel. All guns one degree more right."

Leath passed on the information.

"Let up on the winch," he added. "Ask the ground officer to have the truck moved five hundred yards up the Berquin Road."

Abbott had struggled to his feet. He had gone green about the lips and his hair was plastered down on his forehead.

"Listen here," he protested. "I can't stand height. I'm sorry, but I can't stand it. You'll have to haul me down."

"It can't be done," said Leath, who was watching the needle of the barometer crawl up over the 5000 mark. "We're up for eight hours. Started at seven. You'll be down in time for tea, barring accidents, of course."

"D'you think I'm going to stay up in this blasted balloon half a day?" retorted Abbott. "Nothing of the sort. By God,

sir, I'm ordering you to haul in!"

"Order away until you're blue in the face if you want to," snapped Leath. "I'm in charge here. You wanted to come up. You're up—you'll stay up—and that, my jolly old sir, is that. What?"

"If that gun gets us," hazarded Abbott, "we'll be blown to blazes."

"It's no worse than the trenches," Kinkaird reminded him. "Think of the poor cusses up to their bellies in the mud. *We* sleep in nice, warm beds, don't forget that."

"And your battery is waiting," sighed Leath. "They've fired three shots so far. That 9.2 is a bally nuisance, I grant you that, but what are you going to do about it?"

"I must get down!" insisted Abbott, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. "I—I'm wasting my time up here. Interruptions all the time. One telephone for all of us. It's stupid—"

Leath turned away.

"You'll pardon me, I'm sure," he murmured. "The phone is working again. We've got several things to attend to just now."

For a long, long while Abbott leaned against the side of the basket, listening to the drone of the observers' voices. He was tempted to jump out of the basket and trust himself to the parachute, but he swiftly put the thought out of his mind. Parachutes didn't always open. Accidents happened. The basket, for all its swaying, suddenly seemed strong and solid and homelike.

There was still a lot of time for him to find the range of that German battery behind the Zilvoorde Wood. He couldn't afford to allow himself to be ridiculed by these whippersnappers. He took a firm hold on his binoculars and was about to raise them to his eyes when again he heard the sullen report of the 9.2.

The shell howled down upon him. *Crash!* The burst was hidden by the rear end of the gas bag, which lurched forward, swerving around the cable. Shrapnel sang past the basket. One of the ropes holding the basket to the crosspiece snapped in two. The barometer, torn off its hook, sailed away through the air.

Leath lurched against Abbott's back.

"Sorry," he apologized. "I've been hit."

A dark stain was spreading down the right sleeve of his tunic. Blood ran down the palm of his hand and dripped off his fingertips. He sat down heavily on the seat slung across the middle of the basket. His face was chalk white, and in his eyes there was a faintly surprised look.

"How's the bag?" he inquired.

"O.K," Kinkaird assured him. "Maybe a few holes in the ailerons. That's about all. We aren't losing any height and I can't hear any leaks. Let's see your arm."

He ripped away the soaking sleeve with his sheath knife. The bullet had made a blue lipped hole in Leath's arm. It had plowed its way down through the biceps and had lodged somewhere near the elbow.

Kinkaird sluiced the wound with iodine and applied a first aid bandage which turned red before he could tie it in place.

"I guess I'll tell 'em to haul in," he volunteered. "You're sitting pretty, Jimmy. Hospital for you. You'll be sent home."

Leath shook his head.

"Finish your shoot," he ordered. "Tell the winch to move up the road again." He bit down on his lower lip. "I feel a bit moldy," he apologized. "Take the phone, Kinkaird. Up the road . . ."

"Now listen here," broke in Abbott, who couldn't take his eyes off the severed cords. "This damn thing isn't safe. Half the rigging has been shot away. I never heard of such twaddle in all my life."

"Stick around awhile longer and you'll hear plenty more," snarled Kinkaird. "Finish your own shoot before you start bellyaching."

KINKAIRD clamped the telephone receiver over his ear and adjusted the mouthpiece on his chest.

"If you butt in again," he warned, "I'll place you under arrest. Get that?

You're a blunt, plain spoken son of a baboon, and you make me sick. If you don't like it up here with the slackers, why in hell didn't you stay down?" He bent over Leath. "Stay with it, Jimmy. We—"

A voice spoke to him from the ground. He listened intently, peering up at the drifting clouds.

"All right," he answered. "I'll watch out. Have the tender ready. Mr. Leath's been wounded."

"Anything new?" inquired Leath.

"I'll say!" Kinkaird spoke fast. "Listen! Hear 'em? Richtofen's circus is up above the clouds. Better stand by, Jimmy. Sit on the edge of the basket."

The low pitched drone of airplane engines beat against Abbott's ears.

"What the devil are our own people doing?" he cried. "Why don't they get up there and fight him? Is he coming our way?"

The droning grew more vibrant, louder, until it filled the whole sky.

Kinkaird helped Leath climb up on to the side of the basket and held him there, one arm clamped around his waist.

"Why don't you do something?" persisted Abbott. "Tell 'em to haul us in. For heaven's sake, man, don't be a fool."

"There's no time to do anything. You'll have two seconds to dump yourself over the side if they dive down at us," Kinkaird snapped. "Don't argue. Unhook the map case and get ready to heave it out when I give the order."

"But—"

"Do as you're told!" yelled Kinkaird.

Down below a battery of anti-aircraft guns had burst into action. The shells were bursting out of sight, high above the balloon. The roar of the engines swelled to a deeper note.

Kinkaird listened to the small voice of the telephonist.

"O.K. Tell the archies* to shoot straight at the bag. See anything yet, Glover? They seem to be dead above us.

"All set, Jimmy?" he went on. "You're going to that damn country of yours—all fog and rain and pretty gals. You're a lucky stiff. Sling your legs over the side."

"Can't," Leath whispered. "They've gone numb."

"For the love of Pete, will you do something?" Kinkaird shouted at Abbott. "Grab his legs. Quick! Shove 'em over!"

Abbott did as he was told. He was surprised to find his hands sticky with blood. Leath was leaking like a sieve.

Tac-tac-tac-tac! Machine guns clattered above the roar of the engines. A tracer bullet went by.

"So long, Jimmy. Good luck!" shouted Kinkaird.

Leath vanished over the edge of the basket.

Abbott stood transfixed.

"Now you," ordered Kinkaird. "G'wan! I leave last. Get out!"

"If they miss us—" pleaded Abbott, clinging for dear life to the basket. "Wouldn't it be just as well—?"

"Git!"

Kinkaird's fist landed on the side of his jaw.

A spurt of flame licked through the skin of the balloon.

Abbott tried to steady himself, grabbing frantically at every rope he could lay hands on. Kinkaird struck him again, full in the face, caught him by the knees and heaved him out bodily.

He fell and he went on falling, faster and faster, through an inferno of exploding anti-aircraft shells and tracer bullets. He saw the earth rushing up to meet him; he saw the sky spotted with exploding shells and a silvery airplane zooming up through the bursts toward the clouds.

Then the parachute, which he had entirely forgotten, cracked open and his head was almost snapped off his shoulders as he was jolted into an upright position. The belt held fast; the silk didn't rip. He glided gently down toward the earth.

He had not dropped five hundred feet before the balloon roared down, spouting smoke and flame like a geyser.

He was so glad to be alive that he wanted to cry and shout, and he did both be-

*Anti-aircraft guns: using the balloon as a target sometimes enabled them to bring down the attacking plane, but made things highly unpleasant for the observer.

cause he was all alone in the air where no one could see him. His nose was bleeding profusely, but he didn't care. He was tickled silly because Kinkaird had had sense enough to hit him and throw him out of the basket.

He landed in a beet field with a jolt which drove all the breath out of his lungs.

His first words were "Thank God!" and he meant just that. Two mechanics escorted him back to the road and helped him into the tender where Leath, white and unconscious, lay stretched out on the floor boards.

"What the hell are you waiting for?" snorted Abbott, jumping out again. "Rush that officer to the casualty clearing station as quick as you can go."

"Yes, sir," agreed the driver. "And 'ow about Mr. Kinkaird?"

Kinkaird was still two hundred feet up in the air.

"He can walk back and so can I," Abbott declared. "On your way, my lad, and mind the shell holes. Move, I tell you, move!"

He shook hands with Kinkaird, when the latter grounded, as though they had been long lost friends.

"Have a cigaret," he urged after he had explained what had become of the tender. "By Jove, even the water in the ditch smells good, doesn't it?"

Kinkaird didn't seem to see the open cigaret case in Abbott's hand.

"Look here," he pointed out. "Jimmy's out of action for some time to come. I'm second in command of No. 7 Section. When do you want to finish that shoot of yours on the battery behind the Zilvoorde Wood?"

Abbott gave him a startled look.

"Me—go up again?" he ejaculated. "Never! As long as I live—never! You're all right. I was a bit short tempered in a manner of speaking this morning. I'm willing to leave it all to you. I'm sure you'll silence those blighters for us yet. Yes, I'm quite sure you will."

"How about telling corps headquarters the same thing?" inquired Kinkaird.

"I'll telephone from your post, if I may," agreed Abbott. "I'll be delighted to do so. I'll take all the blame. I was a little too hasty; I can see that."

"Leath'll be glad to hear it," grunted Kinkaird. "He's a funny cuss. Say, come to think of it, I will have one of your cigarets if it's all the same to you."

EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY

By BILL ADAMS

JIM DENNISON sat watching his aunt finish the packing of his sea chest. There were four suits of heavy underwear, all wool. There was a knitted all-wool blue jersey. There were four heavy all-wool shirts, a woolen muffler and a pair of fleece lined mitts. Jim was bound round Cape Horn. His ship would be rounding the Horn in June, one of the worst months in that part of the world. He would need the all-wool things when he was down there. There were some light shirts and there was some light underwear. Before the ship came to San Francisco she would pass through the tropics a couple of times. He would need the light things then. And there were medium weight shirts and medium weight under-

wear for use in the temperate zones, where it would be neither too hot nor too cold. There were socks of various weights, and there were several cloth caps.

Jim Dennison was just turned eighteen. He had no parents. His aunt was a single woman. He was the apple of her eye, her heart's desire. She thought the world of him. He thought the world of her, too.

It was Jim Dennison's first voyage to sea. Neither he nor his aunt knew anything about ships. There had never been a sailor in the family.

"You'll be as careful as possible of your clothes, won't you Jim?" asked Jim's aunt.

Yes, Jim would be very careful of his clothes.

"There's your housewife, Jim. I do hope you'll find it useful. I think you will," said Jim's aunt.

"I'll take special care of it, aunt. It'll be ever so useful, I know," said Jim.

"You'll have to buy oilskins and sea boots after you've joined the ship. Be sure that you don't let them sell you any but the best," said Jim's aunt.

Jim would be very careful about buying oilskins and sea boots.

It was Jim Dennison's first night at sea. It was very cold, and very dark. It was a little after nine o'clock. All day he had been at work, pulling on ropes and helping to set the sails. Now he must stay awake till midnight. He was tired and horribly sleepy. But he was not cold. There was a suit of heavy all-wool underwear against his skin, with a heavy all-wool shirt above it. Over the shirt was his jersey. He was wearing a suit of new oilskins. On his head was a sou'wester. There was a warm wool muffler round his throat.

The second mate's voice rang along the deck. The wind was freshening. Jim Dennison opened his drowsy eyes and lifted his chin from his chest. Some one bumped into him. It was Mike, one of the elder apprentices, a lad who had been a year at sea.

"Come on," said Mike. "We got to take the foretopgallantsail off her."

Shadowy forms climbed into the rigging and started up the mast. In a moment they were lost in the darkness. Some one bumped into Jim. A voice that he recognized as that of the second mate asked—

"Who's that?"

"Dennison, sir," said Jim.

"Hop up aloft and lend a hand to furl that sail," ordered the second mate.

Jim climbed into the rigging and started aloft. The ship was pitching and rolling. In a moment he was alone, no one near him. For a few steps he climbed without difficulty, though slowly. The night had grown darker. He had to feel his way. He could see nothing. The wind came harder and harder. His heavily clothed limbs were awkward. His sea booted feet were awkward. But he managed to get up to the futtock shrouds, that led from the lower rigging to the foretop.

From the rigging to the rim of the foretop the futtock shrouds swung outward, so that he was compelled to ascend at a sharp angle, with his head and hands a lot farther from the mast than were his feet. He was more than fifty feet from the deck. It seemed that at any moment the force of the wind must tear him from the rigging. He gripped the shrouds more firmly and set his feet down carefully. From below him came the steady thunder of the sea. Having passed safely over the top, he drew a deep breath and continued his way up the topmast rigging.

The higher he climbed the more sensible he became to the roll and the pitch of the ship. One of the ends of his muffler was loose and kept getting in his way. He could see nothing, not even the white canvas of the topsails that he was passing. He could hear no voices. An almost palpable darkness was all about him. No lights on the ship, no stars in the sky. At length he came to the topgallant crosstrees where once again he must climb at an outward angle. He reached up, above the crosstrees, and set his hands on the topgallant rigging. At the moment that he lifted a foot, seeking the next ratline to

place it on, the ship pitched heavily. His other foot slipped. More than a hundred feet above the sea, he clung to the topgallant rigging with his feet kicking in all directions, seeking foothold.

The wind beat on him fiercely, choking his breath back. A sudden pelt of rain drove in his face. After what seemed an eternity but was in reality only a few seconds, he found a foothold and managed to heave himself up over the crosstrees. Now he was only a little way from the topgallant yard. He climbed on eagerly. But when the heel of a boot struck him on the mouth he realized that he had been so long getting aloft that the sail was furled and the sailors were on their way down. One of the descending sailors shouted an oath at him. He heard a surly voice growl—

"Get out the way!"

He edged away to one side and clung a hundred and twenty feet above the sea while the sailors hurried past on their way down to the deck. As the last dim form passed him he heard a cheery voice call—

"That you, Dennison?"

He gasped a reply, and was answered by a merry laugh. Then Mike was gone, and he was alone again. He started to descend.

DESCENDING was even more difficult than the ascent had been. The thunder of the sea had become louder. The wind howled. The elements seemed determined to shake him from the rigging. Great rain drops beat on him. Sweat came to his face. Beads of sweat blew from him, mingling with the lashing rain. At length he came to the bulwarks, and swung himself from them to the deck. After the dizzy height to which he had been the solidity of the deck was comforting and delightful. He breathed a deep sigh of relief. A voice close to him said:

"Come on, Dennison. Let's go to the half-deck."

He knew it was against the rules to go into the half-deck while he was on duty. But he followed Mike gladly. Mike drew the curtains over the ports and lighted the lamp. A bell clanged. Four bells—ten o'clock. Next minute the other two apprentices of the second mate's watch came in. Andy had been at the wheel, Chink on the lookout.

"Blowing up a bit," said Chink.

"Let it blow," said Andy. "She's making fourteen miles an hour. What do we care how hard it blows."

Chink said:

"Let her ramble! I bet she'll make 'Frisco in a hundred days."

"Good start, bad finish!" said Mike. "She's getting too good a start."

Andy said:

"Let's have a game of banker— Look at Denny! He's sweating. What you been doing, Dennison?"

"Denny was aloft on the foretopgallantsail," said Mike, and winked at Dennison.

"Good for him! How do you like it aloft?" asked Chink.

"Never mind how he likes it," said Andy. "Here's the cards. Let's have a game of banker. I'll deal 'em."

Andy dealt the cards.

"What you betting?" he asked Mike.

"Box of matches," said Mike.

"You're too darn reckless," said Chink. "I'm only going to bet a dozen matches. What you going to bet, Denny?"

Jim Dennison took his muffler from round his neck and laid it on the table. He felt better so. His throat was free. He was delightfully cool again. He had no idea how banker was played. But he would do the same as Mike. He would bet a box of matches. He was better supplied with matches than were any of the others. He could afford to lose a few boxes. But suddenly Mike said—

"Denny, you going to bet your muffler?"

"Yes," said Jim Dennison.

The half-deck was warm and snug. The muffler had been an awful nuisance. If he lost it it would not matter.

"By cricky, Denny, there goes your muffler!" said Chink next moment. Andy reached out a hand and took Jim Dennison's muffler.

Chink, Mike and Andy jumped to their feet. The door had opened silently. The second mate stood in the doorway.

"So?" said the second mate. "That's it, eh? You young whelps have got your nerve leaving the deck while you're on duty, haven't you?"

"We've only been here a minute, sir," said Chink.

"Let's look at that," said the second mate, and reached for the muffler in Andy's hand. Andy passed it to him.

"That's a dandy fine muffler," said the second mate, and put the muffler round his neck.

"I don't need it, sir," said Andy. "You can keep it if you like."

"Much obliged," said the second mate and, with the muffler round his neck, turned to go.

"Do we have to stick on deck, sir?" asked Andy.

"No," said the second mate. "If you keep awake you three fellows who've been to sea before can stay in the half-deck if you want to. Dennison, you get out and stay on deck."

The second mate went back to the poop. While the three other apprentices played banker for matches Jim Dennison stood till midnight in the lee of the deck house with his chin sunk on his chest and the rain pouring from his oilskins.

"The second mate's all right," said Mike.

"Yes"—Chink laughed, "but if it hadn't been for Dennison's muffler we'd all be having to stay on deck."

"You're dead right we would," said Andy.

IT WAS Monday evening a few days later. It was the dog watch. Supper would be in a few minutes, at five o'clock.

"Dennison," said Andy, "go on aft to the cabin door and get the week's whack from the steward."

Jim Dennison went to the cabin door. Two of the sailors were already there, one from the mate's and one from the second mate's watch. An apprentice from the mate's watch was there too. The steward came out and handed the two sailors the week's allowance of sugar and of marmalade, for each watch. Then he handed the apprentice from the mate's watch the allowance for himself and his three messmates. Then he handed Jim Dennison the allowance for himself, Andy, Chink and Mike. Jim Dennison hurried with it to the half-deck.

"Whack it out, Andy," said Mike. "I'm hungry as sin."

Andy divided the sugar and the marmalade into four equal portions.

"Now for a good feed," said Mike and, having taken two ship's biscuits from the bread barge, spread all his marmalade on them. On the top of the marmalade he spread the sugar. There was a half pannikin of each. Andy and Chink followed suit.

"That's what's called a reefer's sandwich, Denny," said Mike. "Go ahead and have one."

"Maybe he'd sooner try to make his whack spin out till next Monday," suggested Andy.

Jim Dennison was horribly hungry. He had been horribly hungry ever since the ship sailed. He made himself a reefer's sandwich. In a few minutes it was gone. He was still horribly hungry. It had little more than served to whet his appetite.

One of the foremast sailors appeared in the half-deck doorway.

"Any you fellers got some duds as ye can git along widdout?"

"No," said Andy, "I got no clothes I don't need."

"You don't come here bumming from us chaps," said Chink.

"Beat it," said Mike.

"Look at dot!" said the sailor, pointing to Jim Dennison's bunk. Jim's hand knitted blue jersey lay on top of his blankets. "Py yiminy," added the sailor, "I vish I 'ave yersey like dot!"

"Maybe Dennison'll swap it for your week's whack of marmalade," said Andy. Jim Dennison rose to his feet.

"A week's whack nothing," said Mike. "Don't swap it for less than a month's, Dennison."

"Vot you takes for der yersey, poy?" asked the sailor. "I gifs you two weeks whack marmalade and two weeks whack sugar."

Jim Dennison reached for his jersey.

"Hold on, Denny, make him kick through with the first instalment, why don't you?" said Andy.

"I breengs der grub now," said the sailor. In a minute he was back with a half pannikin of sugar and a half pannikin of marmalade. "You gets der same next week too, poy," he said.

Jim Dennison made himself another reefer's sandwich.

The following Sunday. Noon. The mate's watch were eating their dinners. Andy, Chink, Mike and Jim Dennison stood in the side of the half-deck occupied by the mate's apprentices and looked on while they shared out their food.

"I wish every day was Sunday," said one of the mate's apprentices.

"Me too," said another. "Imagine getting doughboys and plum duff every day!"

"Never mind wishing," said another. "Shove some more of that sea pie on my plate. You're cutting my whack short."

"Short nothing," retorted the one who was whacking out the food. "You're getting to be more of a hog every day!"

"Hog your eye," grumbled the other. "I'm no more hog than you are."

"I guess any one would be a hog in this hungry old packet," said Chink. "If ever any hog was hungrier than I am when Sunday rolls round he was some hungry hog."

"Sea pie and plum duff, eh, Dennison?" said Andy. "Wait till our turn comes. We'll show 'em what hungry is, won't we?"

Jim Dennison was ravenous. All through the week dinner had consisted of salt pork or salt horse, with pea or bean soup; a scant allowance of all. Sunday dinner of stringy canned meat stewed up with soggy lumps of under cooked dough seemed food for the gods.

Having finished the sea pie the mate's four boys fell to upon the plum duff.

"How's the plum duff?" asked Mike.

"Same old duff," replied one of the mate's boys.

"Heavy as pig iron," said another.

"It fills a fellow anyway. That's what counts," said another.

"You bet that's what counts," agreed Andy.

The mate's boys finished their meal. The ship's bell struck.

"There you are, Dennison. It's our turn at last. Go get the grub," said Andy.

JIM DENNISON hurried to the galley for the dinner. A sailor of the second mate's watch was already there, getting the men's dinner. With the mess kids in his hands he scrutinized Jim's shirt; a heavy all-wool shirt that Jim had put on clean that morning.

"Say, kid, you got any more o' them kind o' shirts?" he asked.

"I've got four," replied Jim.

"Jumpin' topsails!" exclaimed the sailor. "You ain't got no need for four shirts like that."

A thought came to Jim Dennison. The sailor knew what he was talking about, of course. If the sailor said that he was not going to need four such shirts, then he was not going to need them.

"What'll you give me for one?" he asked, his eyes upon the plum duff in one of the mess kids in the man's hands.

"One ain't no good to a feller," answered the sailor.

"If I swapped two, I'd only have two left," said Jim.

"Two's enough for any one, kid," said the sailor. "If you got two, you got a change, ain't you? Wot more d'ye need?"

A shadow of doubt came to Jim Dennison. It would be cold off the Horn, he knew. Yet perhaps it would not be so terribly cold after all. The ship would not be long off the Horn either. He was close to the half-deck door now. He must decide at once, before the sailor went on to the forecastle.

"What would you give me for two shirts?" he asked.

"Give ye my whack o' duff for six weeks," said the sailor.

"What would you give me for two suits of heavy wool underwear, too?" asked Jim with a sudden inspiration.

"What d'ye want?" asked the sailor.

"Your sea pie for six weeks, too," said Jim.

"Done," said the sailor.

With their dinners finished, Andy, Chink and Mike sat puffing their pipes. Jim Dennison was eating the sailor's sea pie.

"I'm pretty well filled up," said Chink. "But I could eat a couple more whacks of duff if I had 'em."

"Me, too," said Andy.

"Same here," agreed Mike.

Jim Dennison's plate was empty. He was full to the neck. It was the first time that he had been really satisfyingly full since the ship had left port. And he still had a whack of plum duff left. It would do for Monday's dinner.

"Jim's a lucky cuss," said Mike.

"He's lucky right now," said Chink; and added, "What you going to do off the Horn, Dennison?"

"Don't try to scare a fellow," said Mike. "Denny'll be all right off the Horn."

"Sure he'll be all right. We'll all of us be all right when we get down there," said Andy.

"Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea?" Mike laughed. "Come on and let's have a game of banker."

"That's it. Get the cards," said Andy. "Let's win some of Dennison's matches from him."

"Come on, Denny, old son," said Chink.

Jim Dennison sat down. It was chilly out on deck, but it was nice and snug in the apprentices' quarters. He was warm all through. He was so full that he had had to let his belt out to the last hole. The little room was thick with tobacco smoke. His fellow apprentices were first rate sorts. Friendly. Of course he would give them a chance to win some of his matches.

The mate's apprentices came in from setting a sail and looked on at the game of banker. Presently one of them said—

"You birds didn't ought to skin Dennison out of all his matches that way."

"Who asked you anything?" said Andy. "Dennison's a good sport. You don't hear him making any kick, do you?"

The mate's apprentice bent over and whispered to Jim.

"Go ahead and bet something else," he said. "Your luck'll change and you'll skin 'em to a fare-you-well. See if you don't!"

"Cut out the whispering and play fair," said Andy. "Dennison didn't ask you for any advice, did he?" To Jim he said, "I guess you're through, eh, Dennison?"

"I'll bet a pair of wool socks," said Jim Dennison.

"I told you Denny was a good sport, didn't I?" asked Andy.

Presently Chink said:

"Denny, you'd better quit. Your luck's out today."

Jim Dennison had only two of his four pairs of heavy socks left. The second mate looked in.

"Dennison," said the second mate, "go to the wheel. It's time you were learning to steer."

When Jim had followed the second mate from the half-deck, Andy looked up to one of the mate's apprentices.

"Remember your first voyage?" he asked.

"Sure I remember it," came the reply.

"Dennison runs true to form, don't he?" Mike laughed.

"We were all a lot of dern fools when we were first voyagers," said Andy. "Live and learn."

"Go on and deal the cards," said Chink. "Eat, drink and be merry!"

THE SHIP had been almost two weeks at sea. It was Monday evening again, close to five o'clock. The second mate's boys were off duty. In a few minutes they would get their suppers. The sky was blue and cloudless above the ship's mastheads. The sea all about her was blue. Far away on the horizon astern sky and sea looked cold and gray.

"Fine and dandy," said Chink. "We've picked up the northeast trade wind. She's all through with cold weather for a long time to come. Me for some light clothes and the good old bare feet."

Andy, Chink and Mike stripped off their heavy shirts and undershirts, stowed them away in their sea chest, and changed into thin. They took off their blucher boots and heavy socks.

"That's what I like," said Mike. "It's good stuff when the old packet runs straight out of the cold weather into the warm with none of the in between kind."

Jim Dennison took off his heavy clothes. While looking for his lightest things he laid his medium weight wear on the table; three shirts, three suits of underwear and some socks.

"Maybe you'll use that stuff when she runs out of the trades again, Denny, and maybe you won't," said Chink. "Like as not she'll take us from the trades right into cold weather again."

Barefooted and dressed in his thinnest clothes, Jim Dennison felt deliciously cool. The setting sun shone bright through the open ports. The warm wind murmured in the rigging. Presently the bells struck. Two bells—five o'clock.

"Go get the whack, Dennison," said Andy.

Jim Dennison tumbled his medium weight clothing into his sea chest and hurried to the cabin door to get the week's whack of sugar and marmalade from the steward. As he neared the cabin he remembered that this evening he would have only his own whack of sugar and marmalade wherewith to make a reefer's sandwich. The sailor with whom he had traded for his all-wool jersey had made his final payment on the preceding Monday. He was close to the cabin door when one of the sailors caught up with him.

An idea came to Jim Dennison. Turning to the sailor, he asked, "Say, what'll you take for your week's whack of sugar and marmalade?"

"Wot ye got?" asked the sailor.

"I've got some medium weight clothes," said Jim.

Jim Dennison hurried back to the half-deck with the whack. While the others divided it into equal parts he opened his sea chest and fetched out his medium weight wear.

"Denny's got a deal on," said Chink.

With all his medium weight clothes under his arm but one change, Jim went out to the deck where the sailor was waiting for him. When in a moment he reentered the half-deck his eyes were shining. For the next four weeks he would have an extra reefer's sandwich every Monday evening.

"It ain't exactly hot and it ain't exactly cold off the River Plate coast, Dennison," said Andy. "I guess maybe you'll get along all right."

Andy's words caused Jim Dennison no concern. The River Plata coast was a long way off. Meanwhile he was getting two reefer's sandwiches every Monday, and on every Sunday a double whack of duff and of sea pie.

With supper over, the three elder boys puffed their pipes, and watched Jim eating his second reefer's sandwich. When he had finished it he filled his pipe.

"Got a match, Andy?" he asked.

"I've been furnishing you with matches for the deuce of a time already," replied Andy.

"Got a match, Chink?" asked Jim.

"I'm about out. Maybe Mike'll give you a light," said Chink.

"Nix," said Mike; and added, "Andy, you darned old miser, you've won pretty nearly every match in the half-deck. You fix him up."

"Miser, your eye! I won 'em fair, didn't I?" retorted Andy. "What'll you give me for matches enough to last you to Frisco, Denny?"

"Don't trade with him Denny," warned Mike. "You can get some from the skipper's slop chest."

"He couldn't get any from the skipper till Saturday, even if the skipper had any, and I happen to know that he hasn't." Andy grinned, and said again, "What'll you give me for enough to last you to Frisco, Dennison?"

Jim opened his chest and began to turn over its contents.

"There you are," said Andy as Dennison picked up a pair of warm, fleece lined mitts. "You aren't going to need any mitts. They won't let a new chum like you take wheels off the Horn."

"Don't be so sure about that," said Mike.

"Did you ever take wheels off the Horn when you were a new chum, Mike?" asked Andy.

"Well, anyway, he'll need 'em when he's taking lookout," argued Mike.

"How about it, Denny?" inquired Andy. "I got no mitts and I'll have to take wheels off the Horn. You can flap your hands on lookout."

"Flap your hands with a hook!" laughed Chink.

"Who asked you anything, Chink?" Andy grinned and, turning to Dennison, said, "Tell you what we'll do. We'll toss up for it. Come on. Be a sport."

Andy was the eldest apprentice in the half-deck. Not for anything would Jim have Andy think him a poor sport. Since he would not have to take wheels off the Horn he would have no great need of mitts. As Andy had suggested, he could flap his hands on lookout.

"That's a topping fine pair of mitts," said Andy a moment later. "You're a good kid, Dennison." Having put the mitts into his own sea chest he handed Jim three boxes of matches.

DAY after day the ship ran southward with the trade winds in her sails. On a Saturday morning when she was yet about a hundred miles from the equator the wind fell light. A torrid sun blazed down. Because the decks were too hot to walk upon barefoot men and apprentices put on their blucher boots again. With nothing but a light sleeveless undershirt on his upper body, Jim Dennison sweated. The sun beat mercilessly on his head and neck. The glare from the white paint of bulwarks and deckhouses dazzled his eyes.

"Denny," said Mike, "that cloth cap's poor stuff for this kind of weather. The skipper'll open the slop chest when the dog watch comes. You'd better go get a sundowner from him." Save for Jim, all the apprentices were wearing sundowner hats.

The blazing day dragged by. The dog-watch came. For dinner there had been boiled salt pork. Jim could still taste it. His throat and lips felt parched. He had sweated till it seemed that there was no moisture left in him.

"I'll get a drink first," he thought, "then I'll go aft for a sundowner." On his way to the half-deck for a drink he met the sailors on their way aft to the slop chest.

"Next, I gets me tobacco," he heard one say.

"You bet, I gets 'baccy next too," said another.

"Aye," said a third. "First a sundowner, then some 'baccy."

Jim filled a pannikin with tepid water from the half-deck tank and gulped it down. He refilled the pannikin and emptied it again. Again he filled and emptied it. Then, with beads of sweat breaking from his forehead, he hurried aft to the chart room. At the foot of the poop ladder he met the sailors on their way back to the forecastle. Each of the sailors was wearing a new sundowner.

"What d'ye want, boy?" asked the skipper when Jim appeared at the chart room door.

"A sundowner, please, sir," said Jim.

"I'm all out of sundowners," said the skipper. "I've just sold the last."

Dizzy with the heat, Jim went to the half-deck.

"Where's the sundowner, Denny?" asked Mike.

"The skipper hasn't got any left," replied Jim.

Andy reached his sundowner from the bulkhead.

"See how that fits you," he said, and handed it to Jim.

Jim put the light linen hat on and pulled down its wide brim. The sun glare coming through the open ports was killed at once. He immediately felt cooler.

"What would you take for it, Andy?" asked Jim.

"You've got a lot of light undershirts," replied Andy. "Give me three of 'em and the sundowner's yours."

Jim opened his sea chest and brought out three light undershirts.

"Now I'll only have to do a wash every two or three weeks," said Andy.

It was a torrid Sunday. With a bucket of water and a piece of soap Jim Dennison was busy, washing his dirty underwear. Seated on the fiferail close by was Andy, with the linen lining of an old cloth cap on his head. From the back of the lining there hung a white handkerchief. The other apprentices lolled in the shade of the mainsail close by.

"Andy, you old rat," said Chink, "you're a regular miser."

"Live and learn." Andy grinned. "You can't beat the lining of an old cap with a handkerchief sewed on behind when you're out of a sundowner."

It was Saturday evening. The ship was a little way from the Falkland Islands. A cold wind blew. A cold rain fell. A gray sky hung leaden above the mastheads. Long leaden swells rolled up, with tumbling white crests foamy upon their summits. The second mate's four boys were just come below to be off duty till midnight.

"A few more days and the old packet'll be off the Horn," said Andy, as he rolled into his bunk.

"We've had no bad weather since we left the channel. Now we'll soon be getting it in the neck," said Mike.

"Denny, it's your wheel at midnight, eh?" asked Chink.

"His wheel nothing," said Mike. "We're going to get a snorter of a gale pretty quick now."

"We sure are," agreed Chink. "Heark at that! Listen to that for a squall!"

"It'll be blowing great guns by midnight," said Mike. "It's getting cold as sin."

"You'll do no steering now till she's round the Horn, Dennison," said Andy. "You're lucky, and don't forget it. It ain't any picnic steering off the Horn." The four boys pulled their blankets round their chins and were instantly asleep.

At a quarter to twelve one of the mate's apprentices put his head in at the half-deck door.

"Rise and shine, you sleepers!" he shouted. "Tumble out! Shake a leg! It's blowing up!"

The second mate's apprentices were still buttoning their oilskins when the second mate looked in.

"It's your wheel, isn't it, Dennison?" he asked and added, "Keep your eyes on the compass!" Then he was gone.

"By gravy, Denny's going to take wheels off the Horn!" exclaimed Mike.

"It's your lookout, isn't it, Andy?" asked Chink.

"Sure is," replied Andy, and drew on the warm, fleece lined mitts that had once been Jim Dennison's.

It was a few minutes after midnight. The darkness was palpable. A solid wall of blackness. A wall broken only by the light of the binnacle. The binnacle light shone in Jim Dennison's face; into his eyes, just visible under the brim of his sou'wester. An icy rain beat on his oilskinned form, on his bare, unmitted hands. The wind howled. The sea thundered. He had never known the ship to steer so easily. He did not know that a ship often steers more easily in a hard wind than in a light one. He wished that she would not steer so easily. He wanted something to do, some exercise to warm him. His hands were like lumps of ice. Presently he took one of his hands from the wheel and beat it against his side.

"Keep your hands on the wheel," shouted the second mate, from close by.

Jim had been at the wheel almost two hours when he heard voices nearby. The skipper had come up.

"Better take off some sail if the wind freshens any more," he heard the skipper shout. Knowing that his time at the wheel was nearly over he hoped that no sail would be taken in till it was quite over. Taking in sail would make his blood flow, would warm him. The second

mate came and stood by him. The skipper was gone below again.

"Going to blow, Dennison," said the second mate. "At four bells we'll take the mainsail off her."

THE RAIN beat on Jim. The wind buffeted him. But despite the bitter cold he was feeling more cheerful. In a very little while he would be warm all through. Four bells struck. A sailor came to take the wheel.

"Haul the mainsail up!" shouted the second mate.

Making for the gear of the mainsail, Jim Dennison hurried along the dark deck.

"Yo-ho-ho!" shouted a sailor, hauling on the jerking clew line.

"Yo-ho-ho!— Haul for Old Cape Stiff!" shouted another, as Jim felt in the pitchy darkness for the ropes.

The second mate's voice rang out above the roar of the weather.

"Look out for yourselves there! Look out!" he shouted.

"Hang tight, sons!" shouted a sailor.

For the space of a moment the ship seemed to quiver, seemed to brace herself as though to meet a blow. Then, as she lurched sharply over, a great gray-back lifted its unseen head and crashed inboard over the bulwarks.

"Haul away! Haul away-ay-ay!" came the voice of a sailor, knee deep in swirling water, but still holding to the jerking rope.

High in the night above, the mainsail threshed and bellied in its restraining gear.

Knocked down by the insweeping sea, Jim Dennison clutched desperately for a handhold while icy water washed him to and fro upon the rolling deck. It seemed to him an eternity till he was on his feet again. As he rose he bumped into some one.

"Who's that?" shouted the second mate.

"Me, sir—Dennison," gasped Jim.

"Hop up and give 'em a hand to make that sail fast," ordered the second mate.

Soaked to the very bone, with his sea boots full of water, Jim climbed into the rigging.

The mainsail was furled. The second mate was gone to the poop. The men were gone forward. Last of the apprentices, Jim Dennision entered the half-deck.

"Denny, how d'ye like the first little whiff from old Cape Stiff?" asked Mike.

"Denny, you must be cold. Your nose is blue," said Chink.

"Cold nothing. Wait till we get down to Stiff before you start talking about being cold," said Andy.

With shaking fingers Jim unbuttoned his oilskins.

"What happened, Denny? That gray-back get you?" asked Chink.

"You got to get wise to the gray-backs, Dennison." Andy grinned. "Live and learn!"

Jim stripped off his soaked clothing and changed into dry. With door and ports shut, the half-deck was dry and snug. His teeth ceased chattering. A glow of warmth stole over him.

"Sunday, isn't it?" asked Chink presently.

"Sunday it is. Good old plum duff!" said Mike.

Jim Dennison's heart sank, for now he remembered that there would be no two whacks of plum duff for him when dinner time came; no two whacks of sea pie. On the preceding Sunday the sailor with whom he had traded his two heavy shirts and his two suits of heavy underwear had made his last payment.

"Let's have a game of banker," said Andy. "Who's got something beside matches to bet?"

"Not I," said Chink. Mike said the same.

"Cheap skates," sneered Andy. "Dennison, haven't you got anything to bet in your sea chest?"

"I haven't got anything," replied Jim.

"Open it up and let's have a squint inside," said Andy. Jim Dennison opened his sea chest.

"No use. Denny's cleaned out," said Chink.

"He ain't even got another change of heavy clothes," said Mike. "Good night, Dennison! You'll be out of luck if another gray-back gets you before your change is dry."

"Hello! By cricky, what's that?" said Andy, peering over Jim's shoulder into his sea chest. "That's a cracking fine housewife!"

Jim Dennison lifted his housewife from his sea chest. His aunt had made it with her own hands. It was leather on the outside. Inside, in its many little carefully sewn compartments, was Denny's supply of needles and thread, buttons and patches, a thimble and a pair of bright new scissors.

"Don't let Andy skin you out of that, Dennison," said Chink.

"Dry up!" growled Andy. "Who asked you to horn in? Come on, Dennison. How about it?"

"I guess I'll be a cheap sport this time, Andy," said Jim Dennison.

"Suit yourself," retorted Andy. "It's all one to me. I don't want your darned housewife."

"Sour grapes." Chink laughed.

Jim put his housewife away. Not for anything would he lose it at banker. An idea had come to him. In the morning he would take it to the forecastle. Perhaps one of the crew would trade him plum duff for it.

Morning broke drearily with a low sullen sky. Dark seas surged past the ship. The masts reeled ceaselessly against the lowering clouds. The decks were awash with foaming white water. Jim Dennison shuddered.

"She's making good time," said Chink. "By tomorrow we'll likely be off the cold old corner. Then we get it in the neck!"

"You're dead right we get it in the neck," said Mike. "Dennison, you'd best go ask the cook to let you dry your wet things by his fire. You're liable to need 'em mighty soon now."

As soon as breakfast was done Jim took his wet things to the galley.

"Cookie," he asked, "can I dry my things by your fire?"

"D'ye think I'm runnin' a damn laundry?" growled the cook. "Get to hell out o' here!"

"What d'ye want, kid?" asked a sailor when Jim looked into the forecastle a few moments later.

"Who'll trade me duff or sea pie for a housewife?" he asked. He looked hopefully from one to another of the men.

One after another they shook their heads. Despondently he turned away.

Night came again. A night of howling blackness. Not a star. No gleam anywhere. A little after nightfall all hands were called out. Water swirled to Jim Dennison's knees, to his waist, to his armpits. Wind tore at him. Shivering and soaked to the very bone he felt the sharp caress of snow.

A month was gone. A month of constant gales, of furious seas; of rain and sleet and snow. In all the month Jim Dennison had never once been dry, or once full fed. But now at last Cape Horn was left astern. Patches of pale sky showed through the breaking clouds.

"Wait till the old hooker gets to Frisco," said Andy.

"You bet," said Chink. Eagerly Jim Dennison listened to the elder apprentices talking of San Francisco; of places where, for fifteen cents, one might buy soup, meat and dessert; of places where for a dime one could get two hot, sugar coated doughnuts and a big cup of coffee with sugar and cream. Dreaming of port, Jim Dennison tightened his belt and counted the days away.

THE SHIP lay at a San Francisco wharf. It was midafternoon. In a few minutes the stevedores would be gone. In a little while she would be leaving the wharf, to anchor in the bay till morning. Early next morning she would go to sea. One by one the apprentices dropped from the rigging to the deck, coming down from aloft where they had been bending sail.

"Hurrah, my lads, we're homeward bound," said Chink.

"Home round the darned old Horn," said Mike.

For the first time in months Jim Dennison remembered the Horn. And he had but two suits of warm underwear, and no mittens; no muffler, nor jersey. And his oilskins were worn well nigh threadbare. And his sea boots leaked.

The mate came from the cabin.

"Here, you boys!" he called. "Here's the last letters you'll get this voyage." The apprentices gathered eagerly round him. "You can go below and read 'em," he told them. "There'll be nothing for you to do now till she goes out into the stream to anchor."

Seated in the half-deck the apprentices ripped open their letters.

"How's that? How's that for a trim little clipper, eh?" asked Chink, and held up a girl's photograph for the others to see.

"I'll give you a pound of 'baccy for that photo, Chink," said Andy.

"A pound your eye! Make it two pounds," replied Chink.

"Hello! Look at Denny's face!" exclaimed Mike. "What's the good news, Denny?"

"A money order for twenty-five dollars," said Jim Dennison.

"What good's a girl's picture to a fellow. Grub's what counts," said Chink, and tossed the photo of his girl into his bunk.

"Twenty-five dollars would buy a lot of grub, Dennison," said Andy.

Jim Dennison had not the slightest intention of spending his money on grub. His sea chest was well nigh empty, and tomorrow he was going to sea, bound round the Horn.

The second mate looked into the half-deck.

"How's the chance for a fellow to go ashore for a little while, sir?" asked Andy.

"Not a chance," said the second mate.

"Tough luck, Dennison," said Andy.

"What's the matter with Dennison?" asked the second mate.

"He's just got some money from home, sir, and he won't be able to spend it! said Chink.

"What d'ye want to buy, Dennison?" inquired the second mate.

"My sea chest's nearly empty, sir. I'd like to buy some clothes," replied Jim.

"All right, then. Be back in half an hour," said the second mate.

The two mates were talking with the stevedores when Jim Dennison passed the hatch a minute later on his way ashore.

"Ye'll be spendin' Christmas off the Horn, sir, eh?" he heard a stevedore ask.

"Aye. The middle of summer down there," replied the mate. "We'll be having Christmas in midsummer."

Gone out of hearing, Jim did not hear the mate's last words.

"Summer and winter's all one off the Horn. There's cussed small difference."

In the half-deck the three elder apprentices looked sorrowfully at one another.

"Good night!" said Chink. "He's going to spend it on clothes!"

Jim hurried uptown. It had never occurred to him that it would be summer weather off the Horn. He had two suits of heavy underwear and that would be enough for any cold that the ship might meet on the way home. All he needed to buy was suit of good oilskins and a pair of good sea boots. He knew now how to choose good oilskins and good sea boots. He would buy the best to be had. Then he would see how much grub he could buy with what money was left.

Presently Jim Dennison saw, a little way ahead of him, sea boots and oilskins hanging at the entrance to a store. He quickened his step. But in a moment he paused. He was almost at the door of the clothing store. He was at the next door to it. There were cheeses in the window, and big boxes of crackers. There were bottles of pickles, and ready cooked sausages of various kinds. There were cans of condensed milk, stacked up in pyramids. And there were preserves of all sorts.

A thought came to Jim Dennison. He would not be able to carry what grub he bought. He would have to have it sent down to the ship. It occurred to him that

he had better buy the grub first and the sea boots and oilskins afterward. He could carry the latter, of course. He must not run any risk of the grub being late in getting down to the ship. If he bought the clothing first it might very likely be. The ship might have left the wharf when it arrived there. It would not be safe to trust a delivery man to be on time.

Jim Dennison entered the grocery store. First he bought several boxes of crackers and a couple of big cheeses to eat with them. Crackers and cheese would be great for eating at night when it was his watch on deck. Then he bought several large ready cooked sausages. They would take the place of the ship's vile salt pork and salt junk. And pickles would go well with them, of course. He ordered a number of bottles of pickles. After that he caught sight of a great boiled ham. He ordered the ham. Cold ham would be great. Cold ham with pickles and crackers!

Then he remembered preserves. He was very fond of preserves. There was strawberry. He was particularly fond of strawberry. There were plum, peach, apricot, raspberry and apple. He could not determine which he liked best. He ordered some of each. And then suddenly he remembered oilskins and sea boots. It occurred to him that the sea boots did not really matter very much. His old pair did not leak so terribly badly. He would spend the money on condensed milk instead; the thick sweetened milk that oozes slowly out of a little hole punched in the top of the can when a fellow sucks at it. He asked the price of a case. The price rather staggered him. If he bought a case he would not have money enough left wherewith to buy oilskins. He hesitated. But the mate's words recurred to him. "Christmas in midsummer . . ." He decided that he could make his old oilskins do well enough for midsummer, and ordered a case of condensed milk. Except for three dollars his money was all gone. What could a fellow get for three dollars? Chocolate! That was the stuff. He ordered three dollars' worth of chocolate, ordered everything sent down to the ship and hurried back aboard. He was supremely content.

There was no one about the deck when Jim Dennison's groceries arrived. Jim was glad of it. He was afraid of what the second mate might have said. He arrived at the gangway at the same time as the delivery man and conducted him to the half-deck.

"Where's the clothes you bought, Dennison?" inquired Andy when the delivery man was gone.

"I didn't buy any," replied Jim. "It'll be summer when we're off the Horn, won't it?"

The three elder boys glanced at one another. "Sure it'll be summer," said Mike. Jim did not see him wink at Andy.

"Summer off the Horn is right," said Andy.

"Eat, drink and be merry!" said Chink.

Jim Dennison stored his supplies away in his sea chest and in the lockers till there was nothing left on the table but the three dollars' worth of chocolate. He was about to put that away when the second mate looked in at the door.

"Get your money all spent, Dennison?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Jim.

"Get out, all of you," ordered the second mate. "Get the moorings cast off. We're going out to the stream."

As the four boys went out to the deck the mate passed by.

"Say, Mister," said the second mate, "do you like chocolate?"

"Chocolate?" asked the mate. "Who's got any chocolate?"

"I never saw an apprentice yet that wasn't a young liar," said the second mate. "That boy Dennison asked me to let him go ashore to buy some clothes, and all he bought was a lot of grub. I guess he don't know I saw it come aboard."

"Help yourself, Mister," said the mate. They filled their pockets with Jim Dennison's chocolate.

The ship was at anchor in the bay. It was supper time. The four boys entered the half-deck.

"Say, Dennison, how about some of

that chocolate by way of an appetizer," suggested Andy.

"I left it all on the table," said Jim. He had scarcely spoken when the second mate looked in through an open port.

"Dennison, that's mighty good chocolate," said the second mate. "Next time you go ashore to buy grub don't tell me you want to buy clothes."

The cook appeared in the doorway.

"Why the devil don't you fellers come get your hash?" he asked.

"Go stick your snoot in a bag," retorted Andy. "We don't want your old hash!"

"All right, Denny, how about some crackers and cheese?" said Andy when the cook was gone.

"And pickles," added Chink. "Pickles is my middle name."

"Nix on the pickles. Let's have strawberry jam tonight," suggested Mike.

"Let's toss up to see which we have," suggested Chink.

"Toss up nothing. What's the matter with having the whole works?" said Andy.

Jim Dennison set the crackers, the cheese, the strawberry jam and the pickles on the table. Not for anything would he have the others think him closefisted. But once the ship was at sea, of course they would have to go easy on the grub. Otherwise it would very soon be all gone.

JIM DENNISON was keeping anchor watch. For a long time he had been walking up and down all by himself. At ten o'clock he would go to his bunk, and Mike would relieve him. It was rather cold on the deck. The other apprentices were all asleep. The men were asleep in the forecastle. The mate was asleep. But there was a light in the second mate's room. He kept a close eye on the second mate's room. For as long as the second was awake he did not dare to go into the half-deck.

By and by the light in the second's room went out. Jim hurried to the half-deck. He was there only a moment. A ferryboat was passing, and by her lights he could see quite plainly without having to strike a match. He returned to the deck with a can of condensed milk. He made two little holes in it with the point of his sheath knife. Then he tilted it to his lips.

Having been relieved by Mike, Jim was asleep in his bunk. He had not long been asleep when he was wakened by the flare of a match close by his bunk. He opened drowsy eyes. Beside his bunk stood Mike. Mike had a can of condensed milk in his hand and was punching two little holes in it. A moment more and the match was out. Mike was gone.

When Jim brought the breakfast from the galley next morning the other three were seated at the table.

"Never mind the darned old hash, Dennison," said Chink. "This sausage is first rate."

"Help yourself, Dennison," said Andy, and passed him the sausage. "It goes great with pickles."

"Some one shove those crackers this way," said Mike. "After you with the milk, Chink."

Jim tried to figure out how long a case of condensed milk would last at the rate it was going. Five cans were gone already, and the ship was not even at sea yet! One of his big cheeses was almost half gone. One large box of crackers was half empty. As nearly as he could figure things, all his stores would be gone in less than two weeks.

"You're a darned good shipmate, Dennison," said Andy as he loosened his belt.

"I'll say he is," agreed Mike.

"Eat, drink and be merry!" said Chink.

The ship had been at sea a week. Jim Dennison's stores were almost gone. The apprentices came down from furling a sail and entered the half-deck.

"I'm hungry as a hound," said Mike.

"I'm hungrier than a whole pack of hounds," said Chink.

"You ain't any hungrier than I am," said Andy.

Jim was hungry, too.

"Dennison's entitled to keep the rest of his grub for himself if he wants to," continued Andy.

"Sure he is," agreed Mike. "He's been a darned good pal to us."

Jim sat down to crackers and cheese, pickles and jam. He had not yet started to eat when the second mate came in and sat down at the opposite end of the table.

"Pretty soft!" said the second mate. "Pretty soft! We don't get that sort of crackers at the cabin table, and we never see any jam."

"Won't you have some, sir?" asked Jim.

"Well, since you've got so much grub, I don't mind if I do," said the second mate.

Jim Dennison pushed the crackers and cheese, the pickles and jam toward him. Having helped himself liberally, the second passed them on to Andy. "I guess we'll let these fellows have a taste, eh, Dennison?" he asked.

With his mouth full, Jim motioned to Andy to help himself. Not for anything would he have the second mate think him closefisted!

The ship had been five weeks at sea. The second mate's apprentices were seated at a supper consisting of hard-tack and skilly. At a shout from the lookout man they jumped up and ran to the deck.

"Good old Pitcairn Island!" said Andy.

"Bananas for mine," said Mike.

"Pineapples, oranges and green cocoanuts, eh!" said Chink. "We'll be stopping the old hooker in a few minutes."

The apprentices were in the half-deck. Half a dozen brown skinned, barefoot islanders were in the half-deck, too. On the table lay a great heap of tropic fruits. On the deck lay big bunches of mellow bananas.

"See here," said Andy. "Here's a dandy good pair of thin pants. What'll you trade me for 'em?"

One of the islanders took the thin pants. Andy laid a bunch of bananas in his bunk.

Jim Dennison opened his sea chest and brought out his remaining heavy underwear. It would be summer off the Horn. He would have no more need of it. But before he could speak, Mike said:

"That stuff's no use to these chaps, Denny. Trade 'em your light stuff. They'll take that fast enough."

The apprentices' bunks were heaped with fruit. An islander entered with a large basket of oranges.

"I'm cleaned out," said Mike.

"Same here," said Andy.

"Hold on!" said Jim Dennison.

An idea had come to him. He picked up his heavy underwear and ran to the forecastle.

"Any one trade me some light clothes for some heavy?" he asked, looking from one to another of the crew. Another moment, and he was back in the half-deck with an armful of ragged summer underwear.

"How about it? Ain't she a clipper?" Chink was asking. The picture of Chink's girl was being passed from hand to hand. "She's worth a basket of oranges any day, ain't she?" asked Chink.

"Look at my girl," interposed Andy. "She's worth two baskets of oranges. You can have her for one."

Jim Dennison held out his ragged underwear to the islander with the oranges. The Islander took it and set the basket of oranges in Jim's bunk.

The second mate passed by the door, shouting:

"All ashore! All ashore!" The islanders began to gather up their remaining fruit.

"Tough luck, Denny. You haven't got much fruit," said Mike.

He didn't have much to trade," said Chink. "Poor old Denny!"

The islanders were going through the door. Jim looked regretfully into his sea chest. Save for his brass buttoned shore suit, for his white shore shirts and collars, it was empty. Desperately he snatched them all up and called to the islanders.

The island was out of sight astern. The apprentices' sea chests were packed with fruit. In Jim's chest there was nothing but fruit. There was a bunch of bananas at the foot of his bunk. Pineapples hung to his curtain rod. There were coconuts under his mattress. His big basket of oranges was on the table.

"How many clothes you got left, Andy?" asked Chink.

"Darn few," said Andy. "Just enough to get by with."

"Same here," said Mike.

Jim Dennison had just what he stood in.

"What you going to do when she gets to port, Denny?" asked Mike. "You've got nothing to go home in."

"She ain't in port yet." Andy grinned.

"Eat, drink and be merry!" said Chink.

The second mate looked in.

"Any one got any oranges?" he asked.

"I have, sir," said Jim Dennison, and handed him an orange.

"I don't want it," said the second. "The skipper wants some. He ain't got any and he's sore as a bear."

The second looked round the little half-deck.

"Thunder, you've got more fruit than's good for you anyway!" he exclaimed, and picked up the basket of oranges and strode through the door.

The ship had been forty-five days at sea. Jim Dennison was at the wheel. There was no breath of wind. A cold steady drizzle fell upon a leaden sea. Jim's lips were blue. His nose was blue. His hands were numb. His feet were numb. The drizzle seeped through his oilskins, through his dungarees, through the light shirt and the light underwear beneath them. Presently the whistle at the end of the tube from the skipper's cabin sounded. The second mate stepped to the taffrail and listened.

"Any ice about?" inquired the skipper.

"There's a good deal of drift ice round her, sir," replied the second.

A couple of days were gone by. The wind howled. Sheets of spray drove across the deck. Hail battered on masts and spars. With Andy, Mike, and Chink beside him Jim Dennison stood on a swaying footrope high above the sea and helped to gather up a flapping sail. Lightning dazzled him. Thunder rumbled. Distinct above the noise of the storm came the clinking of drift ice.

"How d'you like summer off the Horn?" shouted Andy into Jim Dennison's ear.

Jim made no answer. He was soaked and half frozen.

"Get the grub, Denny!" shouted Andy, as the boys dropped from the rigging to decks awash with foaming water.

Jim went to the galley. The cook passed him a big tin pot full of thin hot skilly. For over three weeks there had been nothing but hardtack and thin skilly for supper; except that on Monday nights there had been a reefer's sandwich apiece. Jim gulped down thin skilly and munched a piece of flinty hardtack.

Cape Horn was far astern. The ship was speeding north in the trade winds. Apprentices and men were on the forecastle head, watching a school of porpoises that played beneath the boom. Presently a sailor left and ran to the carpenter's shop.

"Here y'are," said the carpenter. "It's sharp as a razor."

With the harpoon in his hand, the sailor ran back. The others made way for him. He went out on the boom. He raised the harpoon, poised it, balanced himself carefully on the slender footrope. For a moment he stood rigid, waiting. Then his hand drove downward. The steel flashed. The water beside the ship was instantly tinged crimson. Men and boys hauled in on the harpoon line. As the porpoise lifted clear of the water one of the men leaned over the rail and dropped a looped rope round its threshing tail. Some hauled on the harpoon line, some on the tail line. Jim Dennison heard some one say—

"Porpoise meat's as good as beef steak."

JIM DENNISON'S belt was let out to its last hole. For three days he had eaten all the porpoise meat he could hold, three times a day. In the night watches he had filled up on cold porpoise meat. Now he sat on the hatch. Beside him lay the porpoise's head. He was bending over it. Sheath knife in hand, he was scraping the last shreds of meat from the skull and

jaws, from round the two long rows of pointed teeth. The bell struck, and he jumped up. He hurried to the half-deck, tossed the porpoise's head into his sea chest, and went aft to take the wheel.

"Denny's like all new chums," said Andy. "Crazy for curios."

The second mate walked to and fro, passing and repassing Jim at the wheel. Presently he paused and looked him up and down.

"It's about time you was washing them dungarees, Dennison," he said. "First thing you know you'll be smellin' sour!"

Jim did not possess a change of clothing. And the weather was getting warmer every day. Tomorrow would be Sunday. He would wash his underwear and shirt. But he could not wash his dungarees. There was nothing else that he could wear while they were drying. They were stained with porpoise blood, with spots of tar, with paint and with grease.

It was Sunday morning. Jim's clothes hung drying in the rigging. Dressed in nothing but his dungarees he sat on the rail and gazed over the sea ahead. He was hungry, but he was hopeful. Perhaps another school of porpoises would appear. Andy came from the half-deck, with his brass buttoned shore suit in his hands.

"Gosh, you look like a scarecrow, Denny!" he said, and having hung his shore suit to air went back to the half-deck. Jim looked at the brass buttoned suit. The sun flashed on its bright buttons. From it he looked to his stained old dungarees. He had nothing but his dungarees to go home in! If he wore them much longer they would be ragged as well as stained!

The sailmaker came from his room, noticed the brass buttoned suit and turned to Jim.

"Getting ready for home, eh?" he asked.

An idea came to Jim. He jumped down from the rail and walked up to the sailmaker.

"Sure," said the sailmaker. "There's some old bits of canvas ye can have."

Jim Dennison sat on the hatch with his housewife beside him. In one hand was a threaded needle. On his other thumb was a thimble. On his knees were some pieces of old canvas. His scissors lay close by. By and by he rose and went to the sailmaker's room.

"Changed yer mind?" asked the sailmaker.

"Yes, Sails," replied Jim. "I can't do it."

"I knew ye couldn't do it," said the sailmaker. "Gimme that there housewife an' I'll make ye a canvas suit in trade."

Dressed in a jacket and pants made of old canvas Jim bent over a bucket. He was washing his dungarees.

The ship was in port. Dressed in their brass buttoned suits Andy, Mike and Chink were packing their sea chests. Dressed in a suit of faded old dungarees, with a torn and faded shirt beneath them, and an old cloth cap on his head, Jim Dennison sat on the edge of his bunk and watched them. The sun shone in at the open ports and flashed on the brass buttons of the three elder apprentices. It shone on the shiny leather peaks, on the gilt braid of their caps and on their clean white collars.

Jim Dennison rose and opened his sea chest. In one corner there lay the blackened head of a porpoise. There was nothing else.

"Denny, that curio of yours stinks," said Andy.

Jim Dennison picked up the porpoise's head and looked at it. He had long ago lost interest in it as a curio. He had never finished scraping it. For a moment he thought of throwing it over the side into the dock. Then it occurred to him that it would do as a present for his aunt. And besides, it wouldn't look well for him to take his sea chest home quite empty. He dropped the porpoise's head back into his sea chest and closed the lid.

Andy, Chink and Mike helped one another across the gangway with their sea chests. Jim Dennison needed no help with his. He put it on his shoulder and carried it ashore. He had not a care in the world. He was going home!

The LAST RIDE

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

A Story of the Racketeers

IT WAS late, and Joe Russell had found his last ride for the night. He was feeling sentimental about it, though with a grim kind of sentiment. It was not often these days that Joe Russell entered the old neighborhood, and when he did it was only through the exigencies of business. A New York taxi driver eventually penetrates to every least corner of the sprawling town, and the old neighborhood was no exception.

There were three in the cab, three men Joe had found standing drunk and hilarious on a deserted Bronx street corner at four in the morning. Only two were hilarious, that is; the third had weakened and succumbed, and his lurching companions dragged him sodden to the cab.

Drunks were always risky; ordinarily Joe avoided them. Tonight, however, one of them solemnly paid in advance with a two-dollar bill. Joe drove them downtown.

First Avenue was quiet, and the cab sped swiftly through the Harlem produce section where, below grimy tenements, sidewalks were stacked with crated grapes, lettuce and melons. An odor of mingled blooming and decay hung over the damp streets.

A knock on the window caused Joe to slow up near 96th Street. He halted the cab at the corner and jumped out to open the door. He was slender, deft handed, of medium height, and the faint lines of twenty-eight years of strenuous living were beginning to show on his lean, firm jawed face. In the corners of his mouth lurked a grin of tolerance, understanding, and appreciation of all the humor life contained.

Two of the men came out. They stumbled, and clung to the cab. The third remained inside, asleep in a corner. Joe eyed him dubiously.

"You take good care our friend," ordered one. "Treat him right, understand? We're counting on you to treat him right."

"We decided we ain't going home yet, brother, see?" explained the other. "We're on a bender to celebrate. Boy, when we hit town we leave our mark! Don't we, pal? Don't we leave our mark?" he demanded of his partner.

"Judas on horseback, boy, and how! Leave our mark? Boy, and where!" The other roared with laughter.

Joe was still smiling, but uncomfortable. These two would be pulled in if they kept it up. Why didn't guys have sense?

"Where does your friend go?" he inquired.

The pair consulted, arms about each other's shoulders. One was tall, blond, with pale, flat lips; the other stocky, dark, and possessed of a faintly hoarse voice. They agreed upon an address on York Avenue. It sounded close by. The two dollars would cover the fare, and Joe was satisfied. The pair proceeded on a wavering course westward, and Joe, casting a wry glance after them, climbed back behind the wheel and went his way.

Those guys were never from the old neighborhood, Joe told himself. A section that stretched from the docks and warehouses far across the town, embracing factories, a freight yard, homes, the roaring L, and rows of flat houses, it nurtured a shrewd, sophisticated type too familiar to his eye. These lads were tough, but somehow in a different way.

Joe had been a fair example of the type —rash, reckless, and a lover of the good things of life. There had been no deep evil in him, simply an acquiescence in the ways of the neighborhood. They were not the ways of ultimate wisdom, as Joe discovered one day when the Law reached out and took hold of him with dire grasp.

A car had been stolen. Joe had not stolen it. Nevertheless, he was found at the wheel. He had been indiscreet enough to refrain from inquiring into its pedigree when borrowing it from a friend. The police regarded him as ripe for a trip up the river on general principles, and smoothed the way.

Joe found it impossible to accept his plight with the nonchalance of the true criminal. There was a girl, and he faced not only separation but her certain loss. She was that kind, the sort who, though loving deeply, would never give her children a criminal father. Joe wrought mightily; but he managed to escape the practical justice of the police only through the grace of another's intervention. It was sheer luck that this man of power decided to intervene, for Joe had no claims upon him. Joe did not forget—neither the other's generosity, nor his own luck, nor the hard eyed reluctance of the police to let him go.

Joe moved as far from the old neighborhood as he could travel, and settled in Brooklyn. Eventually he married. He was careful and gave the cops no further cause to molest him. He found nothing dull about making a living in a taxicab, and it rewarded him in strict proportion

to the work he expended on the job. He had, he often felt with a vague sense of gratitude to all that caused it, come to his senses just in time.

Some difficulty developed about the address when Joe arrived tonight. Apparently it was a vacant lot. He walked to the houses on either side, and made certain it was neither. He frowned, glancing at the bare board fence fronting the empty land, and opened the cab door.

"Hey!" he shouted. He knew he faced a task, but he was undismayed. "Snap out of it! Where's this place you want?"

The man did not stir. He slumped in the seat exactly as Joe had first observed him, limp, hat over his eyes, out of this world completely. He was a stocky figure, and graying hair showed behind his ears.

"Come on!" Joe ordered.

He entered and shook the man by the arm. The man lost his balance and toppled over on the seat. His hat fell off. The street lamp sent a shaft of light through the window on his face. Joe watched it, motionless, for a full moment.

"Good God!" he uttered then. Horror was in his voice. "Pete Malden! For God's sake—*Pete!*"

The other did not hear him. There was a froth of blood about his strong mouth, and his eyes were sightless. He was dead.

JOE was wise in the ways of his city, and he knew without elaborate deduction what had happened. Pete Malden had been a big man in his time, an arbiter of many destinies. He had ruled the old neighborhood with an open handed if somewhat sinister strength. He was of the underworld without taking an active hand in its coups, and he was of the upper world without a blush for the seeming duplicity. He was a fighter, whether in politics or labor trouble or plain business competition. Men in distress came to him for protection and paid well for it. Youngsters in a jam came to him for help—and received it free. It was Pete Malden who had intervened in time to save Joe Russell.

Pete had outlived his time, and therein lay his tragedy. A new breed of vicious underworld despots rose around him and challenged his reign in the neighborhood. Their methods were not his; they were more ruthless, more callous and efficient. A clash was inevitable since they could not cooperate in harmony.

And now it had happened. Joe was suddenly raging.

"Pete, they got you!" he cried. "Damn them, and I let them go! I never so much as saw your face." He released his feelings in an epithet of searing profanity, kneeling on the floor of the cab, the dead man gripped in his hands.

A voice sounded over his shoulder, crisp and short.

"What's up? What's the matter here?"

Joe swung about, and looked into the hard, suspicious eyes of a policeman who had crept up and peered within the door.

"What does it look like?" he snarled. "They killed him!"

"Oh, yeah?" said the cop. "They did, eh? Well, come out of there. And come out slow!"

And Joe came, with a second and quite different kind of chill about his heart.

Joe Russell was never to forget the ensuing twenty-four hours. No man in his situation ever could. He was "on the books", to put in a phrase his status with the police, and he had been discovered near the waterfront with a murdered man. Worse, he was acquainted with the victim. A reasonable motive for the crime was lacking, but the police were efficient. Given time, they would find one.

They questioned Joe for the better part of a day and a night. They entered no definite charge against him yet. They were not brutal; they knew more artful ways of handling his sort. They were sympathetic, describing the horrors of the chair. They were threatening, dangling before him the easier alternative of a second degree sentence. They were grimly silent, like guards on a death watch.

They plied him with their entire bag of tricks.

But they got nowhere. Joe stuck to his story. He described the two men who had ridden with Malden in his cab. He accounted for every second of the fatal night. He reminded them of his debt of gratitude to Malden, and defied them to find a motive. Cold and white and racked with the pain of physical exhaustion, he faced them and remained undaunted.

They had taken him first to the nearest station house, leaving the dead man in the hands of the medical examiner. Every few hours thereafter they had rushed him to another precinct, hoping by this ruse to outwit any gang which might be busy on his behalf. Finally they had taken him to headquarters, where the experts of the homicide squad got to work on him at their leisure, uninterrupted. The commissioner himself looked in on the inquisition once, to fix Joe briefly with a baleful stare before going his way. Upright in a chair in a cone of bright light he sat in a dusty, bare room and waited for them to wear themselves out.

Red eyed and haggard, he was taken at last to a small office and placed in a comfortable seat beside a desk. An elderly, shrewd faced inspector of detectives shooed all others out of the room, and seated himself behind the desk. He offered Joe a cigar, and lighted one himself. He took his ease and smoked silently for a moment.

"Well, kid," he said at length, "we've been going steady for a good many hours, and we're right back where we started from, aren't we?"

Joe said nothing.

"Confidentially," continued the officer, rolling the cigar to a corner of his mouth, "who do you think bumped off Pete Malden?"

"I told you. I described the guys. Go out and find them."

"Don't worry! We're looking for them. Now, supposing we brought them in, would you be willing to tell the same story to a jury that you told us?"

"I sure would," asserted Joe. There was a hard passion in his words. "Pete helped me once. I'm not looking for trouble, but you do your job, and I'll do mine. Those two rats were from some other city, and I don't have to be afraid of them."

"Meaning that if it were a local affair, you'd welch?"

Joe met the inspector's gaze without replying. Finally he spoke.

"That's a hard word you used, Inspector. I don't think I care to answer offhand. I have a family, and you guys wouldn't help much if I got in a jam with the wrong people."

The officer considered.

"Well, I think we'll let you go. You're a material witness in any case, remember, and we could hold you very easy by putting such a high bail on you that you'd never be able to furnish it. I'll see that it's made about five hundred dollars. You can dig up surety for that."

"Thanks. I have a living to earn."

"And while you're out," went on the officer, his brows elevated significantly, "it might just be possible that you'd come across something in the line of information that would put you in right with us if you delivered it here. Don't you think so?"

Joe smiled, his eyes narrowing.

"Don't ever make a mistake and call me a stool pigeon, Inspector. I'm not. But by a freak of luck I have a personal interest in this case, and that may go a long way. You never can tell."

"It was luck, all right, and time will tell whether good or bad. Any cab driving along that avenue then would have picked up Pete and his friends. But it happened to be you—and I'm wishing you well!"

The officer rose, grinned wryly; and Joe knew that he was free. There remained but the formalities of appearing before a magistrate and arranging certain matters whereby five hundred dollars would be forfeited if he disappeared. It cost Joe exactly one hundred dollars to fix things, but grimly he felt that it was worth it.

FOLLOWING a sleep of fourteen uninterrupted hours, Joe Russell went hacking again. His experience had cost him a good sum, and he had to make it up. And he did something now which he long avoided. He pursued business in the old neighborhood. And kept his ears open.

There was a certain corner where an L station and a crosstown trolley line fed a busy hack stand. Joe, in the term of the profession, played the line across the board. He headed back for it after each trip. At that corner there was a steamy, white tile restaurant, and about its tables the drivers were wont to gather while waiting for a call. Joe joined them, having little to say but listening much. In the gossip of its taxi drivers will be found the intimate history of any section of any town.

"Where's Butch Kinsella these days?" he asked his confreres casually. Or, "What racket is Mike Ruffo working now? Still peddling beer?" He was told with many details, a large number of them imaginative, but all tending to supply him with the information he desired. And he also asked the most important question, "What kind of jam did Pete Malden get into that he got himself bumped off?" They knew, and marveled, that he had driven the murder cab, and were chary of reply.

"Hard to say! Must 'a' been a couple of Chicago mugs with a grudge that done the job. Pete played around with a couple of gambling joints but I don't think he was running any games. Selling them protection, probably. It's all a mystery, and the cops can't find a single lead."

The gambling joint tip proved of interest to Joe. He followed it up. He knew pool rooms, speakeasies, garages, where it was possible to drop in and make casual inquiries without exactly wasting his time. In a couple of weeks he had put together a story which, while based on conjecture, had few loopholes in it.

Pete Malden, for a consideration, had guaranteed immunity from holdups to several prominent if discreet gambling houses maintained about that part of the town. His men, young, alert and furnished with plenty of nerve, idled about the places, and at a hint from the proprietors, accompanied the heavy winners home. It was a lucrative business, for protection was essential to the success of the games, where thousands of dollars in hard cash changed hands nightly.

Somebody with an organization of young men of his own had coveted this concession. He had tried divers means of forcing Pete Malden out of the racket, and thereby had earned the latter's sinister enmity. A feud followed, and Malden had lost. His enemy had imported a pair of gunmen from a distant city; and the two, unknown to the usually cautious Malden, had lured him to his death in some bare tenement room, gotten rid of the body and then fled the city.

The point which convinced Joe Russell of the soundness of this theory was the succession of minor stickups which followed the death of Pete Malden. They received scant notice in the papers. No large sums were taken, nor was any prominent gambler molested. Individuals of small importance were dragged into dark hallways close by the resorts and relieved of their cash at the point of a gun. Their wails echoed but thinly in the city's vast crescendo. Soon the deprecations ceased. Those concerned were grateful, and forgot about it. Only to Joe Russell was the phenomenon significant. The police had set out with hollow sound and fury to quell this latest crime wave, but Joe knew the responsibility was not theirs.

Some one with an organization of keen eyed gunmen was furnishing protection now in Pete Malden's place, and only the proprietors of the joints knew who he was. And they, anxious only to preserve peace, would be the last on earth to tell.

One night, waiting at the head of the hack line for a call, Joe was approached by two men who stood beside the cab for a moment studying him silently. They were quietly dressed, their faces were

masks, and their eyes shrewd. Joe returned their stare.

"Well?" he said. "Taking this cab?"

"Sure," replied one. "Come on. Let's go for a ride."

Joe asked for no more specific directions. The pair got inside, and he set out westward across the town. They had more in mind than transportation.

"Stop anywhere along here," ordered a voice from within, after a time.

Joe drew up beside a dark, silent factory building. A street car rumbled by, leaving the lonely night stillness of an industrial quarter in its wake. Joe swung about lazily and looked inside the cab.

"We wanted to have a talk with you, friend," the spokesman said. "You're Joe Russell, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Pete Malden was found in your cab, wasn't he?"

"He was."

The man grunted thoughtfully.

"What brings you up in this neighborhood lately?" he went on. "You been away from the Bronx a long time."

"It's the section I know best," Joe said. He was wary, but at his ease. "There's better hacking here than there used to be."

"Oh—that so?" After a pause came another query, "You been asking a lot of questions around, haven't you?"

"Sure. It ain't every day I find a guy dead in my cab. You'd ask plenty questions too if you were me."

"I don't know about that," observed the man. "I ain't so sure at all. In fact, I think I'd keep my mouth shut like I never kept it before."

"Well," said Joe with a shrug, "nobody ever incriminated himself yet asking questions."

"Wrap it up!" interjected the second man. His voice was sharper. "Out the window! We're wasting time."

"Wait a minute—" began the first.

"Wait, hell! We're not selling anything." He addressed Joe. "Listen here, bozo! You're receiving orders to stay out of the Bronx, and they're coming from headquarters. Out of the Bronx—or out of this world! I'm giving you the whole works."

Joe was silent.

"Well," he finally uttered in an edged voice, "you guys sure handle a hot line! No mincing words, is there? Suppose I remind you of the hacking ordinance allowing a hackman to pick up business anywhere in the city?"

"We're not talking to a hackman. We're talking to Joe Russell, who's beginning to smell a hell of a lot like a rat to us."

"And who are you?"

"That's what you'll find out if you hang around."

"O. K!" said Joe abruptly. "Want to go back to where we started?"

"Yeah. You got your orders. That's all we want!"

THE CAB started on a sudden, and sped to the corner where the hack line waited. But arriving there, it did not stop. Joe continued across the avenue and some distance along the block beyond. He drew to a sudden halt close by a strolling patrolman who swung his nightstick idly as he walked. His gaze fell casually on the cab, and he watched the two passengers alight.

Joe came out from behind the wheel with celerity. He demanded no payment. He walked up to the policeman, while the pair paused to watch suspiciously.

"Hello, Dan," said Joe. His head jerked toward the two men. "Do you happen to know those two guys?"

The officer gave them his scrutiny, deliberately and impassively.

"Yeah, I know them. Any trouble?"

"No. But who are they?"

"They're a couple of Steve Lasky's gorillas. What's up?"

"Nothing that need bother you, Dan. That's all I wanted to know. And believe you me, I've just learned a hell of a lot!"

The sharp voiced member of the pair plucked his companion's sleeve, and the

two departed up the street. There was something ominous in their departure. Joe Russell had betrayed rare indiscretion in going directly to a policeman. Joe knew it, and his eyes narrowed and a slight smile curled his lip as he watched them go.

Joe Russell was willing enough to stay out of the Bronx now. Nay, he was anxious. He had obtained what he came for, and wanted nothing more of that borough.

He paid a visit to police headquarters, and made his way to the same small office in which he had had his last official interview. The mellowed, shrewd inspector with whom he had talked gave him gruff welcome.

"I've got something for you guys to work on," Joe told him when he was seated. He added the warning, "It's only a tip, and don't expect me to do your work for you. I'm in this for personal reasons, not for your benefit."

"That's O. K. with us—so long as you're in it!" the officer said, smiling.

"The dope is this," said Joe. "You put the finger on Steve Lasky, and you'll collar Pete Malden's murderer. You know Steve?"

"Slightly. He's been on the books a long while."

"Yeah, but he's never done time. He's too smart for you. He didn't work the smoke in this case either, and you'll have to step high to catch him. Those two lads who put Pete in my cab were from the West. Steve hired them to do the job. You haven't got a thing to connect Steve with the job but those two, and it'd take twenty years to find them."

"It's been done, you know," said the officer quietly.

"Often?"

"Often enough to make it always worthwhile. The police in twenty cities have your description, and we're waiting to hear from them."

"Well, I'm glad that's none of my business. I wish you luck."

"Fine! Now let's have this story of yours. I know who Steve Lasky is, and I know his record. How does he figure in the case?"

Joe told him. The officer listened. It was not necessary for him to interrupt, for he knew the background Joe described from twenty years of acquaintance with it. He knew the motives which ruled these underworld figures, and their behavior in any given circumstance.

"It's a clear cut case," he said, on Joe's conclusion, "to *me!* But how about a jury?"

Joe sat back in the chair, and turned his hands upward.

"Your job, Inspector. I've done mine. I'm through. I have my orders to stay out of the Bronx, and believe me I'm keeping them. They think I'm harmless, but they don't want me around on general principles. If they knew I came here, I'd be found lying in some swamp in the East Bronx tomorrow morning, out this world."

The inspector's brows were knit in thought.

"I'll see what can be done. There's no use making a pinch unless we can carry our argument through to a conviction in court. I'll get our men busy on it, and have a talk with the district attorney." He smiled with a tightening of the lips. "We have ways of doing things in the department, you know. Sometimes you'd be surprised!"

Joe was thoughtful.

"You go right ahead and surprise me, Inspector. I won't mind. Pete Malden probably wouldn't remember my name if he were alive this minute, but he did something for me once I ain't likely ever to forget. I got a good reason—out in my home in Brooklyn."

The officer's smile was quizzical and understanding.

"I know your case," he said. "I think I get your point. And reason or not, we're grateful for your help."

Joe felt, as he made his departure from the building, that a great load was off his chest. He had done his job. It was not without its risk, but he had done it. Little knots formed in his jaw each time he

thought of that strong, generous face with the froth of blood about its lips and the sightless, staring eyes. Those lips had spoken for him and those eyes had looked on him in sympathy. In one way only could Joe Russell repay his debt. That was in loyalty—in loyalty that lasted even after death.

THERE was a thrill for Joe Russell in the headlines four days later, a hot, sharp thrill of satisfaction. Steve Lasky, the streamers informed the world, had been arrested as a party to the murder of Pete Malden. The mystery of Malden's death had intrigued the public for a week, and then had died of inanition. Now it came to life again with a bang, for Lasky had begun to make his name known beyond the precincts of his little barony. He was news.

Joe awaited the summons to headquarters or the district attorney's office again, but none was forthcoming. He remained home, in the interests of convenience and discretion. He was none too certain of his security on the streets until this was over. Once Lasky was destroyed, of course, he would be safe. He reassured his apprehensive wife with laughter for her fears, and played cards with her to while away the time.

Two slow days passed. The news accounts were vague, consisting of formal statements from both sides which told readers nothing unexpected. Then the third day, in smaller headlines than were used on the first, the world learned that Steve Lasky had walked out of the arms of the police to freedom. His counsel had pleaded a point of justifiable doubt before a judge who felt bound, in law, to sign the writ that turned him loose. Neither the police nor the district attorney could bar his way.

Joe left the house immediately he read the story, and he carried the paper with him. He did not want it to come to the eyes of Mrs. Joe if he could prevent it. He went to a telephone booth and called his friend, the inspector.

"What in hell have you guys gone and done?" he wailed. "You let him walk out like that—and not a peep out of the whole department?"

"Easy, boy, easy!" cautioned the harrassed officer. "We know what we're doing. We hold these jobs and draw down pay for them because there's nobody in sight to do the dirty work any better."

"Well, all right. But what happened?"

"Never mind what happened. We're not advertising it. Can you lay low for awhile? I'd advise you to do it."

"You're damn right I'll do it. You got me in a nice hole. Has any one mentioned my name to Lasky?"

"Not to my knowledge. Go home now, and stay there. You'll hear from us when we want you."

Joe Russell did not go home. He went for a long walk through the peaceful streets of Flatbush. And as he walked, he wondered. Wondered where he stood now—and if he was likely to be still standing erect when a week had passed.

He distrusted the calm warnings of the inspector. That shrewd individual, while cautioning him, would not fill Joe with too great alarm, even if the occasion warranted. Joe was valuable, and must not be frightened into precipitate flight. On the other hand—and Joe paused in his stride as the thought suddenly struck him—the cops, fearful of his safety, might seize him and hold him in the Tombs as a material witness in too great jeopardy to be permitted at large. It had been done before.

Joe entered another phone booth, and called a number in the Bronx. A chatty, leisurely conversation followed. The instrument at the other end was in a cigar store, a place which thrived on the sale of remarkably few cigars. Its proprietor was much more interested in racehorses and in bets placed upon them. He had leisure for talk.

"Sure!" he said scornfully. "Lasky'll beat that rap. What have they got on him? Nothing but a good guess, now that Coke Finnan is gone."

"Coke Finnan? Where does he come in?"

"He's the king pin. The cops counted on putting the case in the bag with his testimony."

"Oh," said Joe. "I see!" He saw a great deal.

"Yeah, it's up the creek for the cops now!"

"But what happened to Coke?"

There was a silence, then a laugh at the other end.

"I got a good one in the third at Latonia today, Joe," said the other. "Want some of it?"

Joe laughed also. He declined with thanks, and concluded the conversation.

So the cops hadn't been so dumb after all! They had the case sewed up—and then the chief witness disappeared. No wonder they weren't advertising. They had given themselves away, and Lasky was free to perfect an alibi and to eliminate anything or any one likely to menace his continued liberty.

"The hell!" murmured Joe to himself. "Now just what does that make me?"

It made Joe Russell something closely resembling a glorified goat, and no one recognized the fact better than he.

Early in the afternoon, still unsettled of mind and harassed by doubt, Joe made a third phone call. It was to his home. He gripped the instrument crushingly and his face blanched as he heard Mrs. Joe's voice come over the wire. She was almost hysterical.

"Joe! Joe, are you all right? Honey, are you safe?"

"Of course, dear—"

"I've been almost out of my head. Those men—they wanted you. I couldn't stop them—"

"*What men?*"

"I don't know. They didn't do anything. That is, they rang the bell and walked in when I opened the door. They pushed me aside and went all through the house. They were looking for you."

Joe forced a laugh, a shaky effort.

"Why, that was all right, dear. They were probably cops. Lasky's free temporarily, and the cops are looking out for me, that's all. Don't you worry. I'll come home later, safe and sound."

But Mrs. Joe would not believe him. Nor did Joe believe it himself. Those men were not police. He repeated the words—*they were not police!* An icy hand held his vitals in its grip.

Joe Russell thereafter engaged in an hour of the profoundest thought of a lifetime. His was a well balanced nature, easy going and inclined to the code of live and let live. But certain parties at that moment had in mind something other than that tolerant code, and Joe perforce abandoned it. He could find nothing to replace it, to sustain him.

He was in danger. That was a fact, hard and sure and unalterable, which he could consider with a certain calmness. Not so calmly could he consider what to do about it. He could not remove himself from peril, for that would make him a fugitive in the eyes of the law. He must stay to see whatever was in store for him, through. He could not go to the police because their first act would be to speed him to confinement, where he might languish indefinitely. And he had to make a living; he had more than himself alone to regard. There was no way to turn.

STILL baffled and nursing a gnawing desperation in his breast, he went to his garage and checked out his cab for the night. Vaguely he felt the impulse to place himself behind the wheel, where his identity was partly hidden by the badge of his trade and where speedy flight was instantly at his command. Uncertainly, too, he studied the only helpful course of action he could devise, that of seeking out those who had been the friends of Pete Malden and finding shelter somewhere among them.

He traveled northward through Manhattan. He was going back to the Bronx. Dangerous it was there, but in the rest of the city there was no aid for him. It was something close to instinct that took him

back to the old neighborhood irresistibly.

Once over the Willis Avenue bridge, beneath which the Harlem River ran its sluggish, cluttered course, Joe felt a renewal of strength. He was rousing, both at the sting of danger and the reassuring influence of surroundings that were familiar to him from childhood. For a moment, even, among these commonplace, cheerful, hurried streets, his plight seemed not quite real. He set about his first purpose with a hard, quiet smile of returning confidence.

Joe carried with him what was for a hackman a considerable sum of money. Preparing for whatever eventuality might arise, he had drawn from his savings an extra hundred dollars. He felt glad now that he had done so; it could serve him well.

He left the cab at the curb before a store in a dingy street, and walked through the doors of the place. It was a curious establishment. Its stock of merchandise embraced a bewildering variety of the practical and the gaudy—clothing, toys, tools, hardware and sporting gear—and most of it was on display, crowding the shelves, the counters, and even the aisles. Joe shook his head at the clerk who came forward, and searched through the store for the proprietor. He found him seated at a desk in a microscopic office far in the rear, busy over a multitude of papers and columns of figures.

"Evening, Fink," said Joe. He sat down beside the desk.

Fink studied Joe over his glasses, a dry, sparse, small man; recognized him and grunted—

"Evening!" He was barely polite.

Joe did not mind. He conversed idly for a few minutes, and then leaned close to reveal his errand. No emotion was revealed on the face of the merchant. After staring at Joe for a moment as though trying to divine his purpose, Fink rose, walked to a cellar entrance, and disappeared. In a moment he was back, and he carried with him something wrapped in tissue. It was compact and heavy. It was, in fact, a small revolver, loaded and oiled. Joe glanced over his shoulder, hefted the weapon, and slid it into his pocket. Then he counted out seventy-five dollars in bills to the silent little man. Fink thrust the money into his pocket, mumbled a farewell and returned impatiently to his figures. Joe grinned, returned the scant courtesy, and sauntered forth. On the streets of New York, where the law decrees no man but paid police may carry weapons concealed, that night another gun went walking. It was not without a host of company.

Joe drove after that to a restaurant of old renown, where Pete Malden had been a familiar for years. It was a spacious resort, a little out of the way, where wide tables were served by waiters venerable in their jobs. Here had the sporting fraternity gathered.

There were many people present tonight. Joe walked among the tables slowly. He had several men in mind, but saw none here. Most of those he viewed were strangers. He was not greatly surprised. Any friend of Pete Malden would have reason to be in the background tonight.

On his way out, Joe caught the eye of one who sat alone at a table close by the entrance. He was a thin, sharp nosed man with cunning eyes. His glance shifted immediately, and was bent on his plate. He ate absorbedly as Joe paused and gave him ironic scrutiny.

Steve Lasky would know that Joe was in the neighborhood tonight. Dan Mularkey, known otherwise as the Rat, would take care of that for the sake of whatever small favor it would bring him. Joe shrugged and went outside. It would do no good to try to stop him.

It was a strange Odyssey, that journey of Joe Russell's through most of the vast Bronx. And a futile one. He was alone among Pete Malden's friends each place he visited. Faces which he thought might welcome him merely stared in baleful coldness, and repelled him. Others were suavely polite, and ironic in their cordiality. He continued on.

At a street crossing where he paused for

a moment waiting for the red lights to change to green, the officer presiding raised a hand as he was about to get in motion. The policeman sauntered over.

"Hello, Russell! Hacking in the Bronx —tonight?"

"Not exactly," said Joe. "I'm just wandering around. I'm looking for somebody."

The officer smiled, eyes on his crossing.

"I expect there must be one or two people looking for you."

"I know. They're looking in Brooklyn. That's why I came up here."

"Well, kid, I wish you luck. I'll go along with you if you want to find a good place to sleep, over at the station house."

"No," said Joe.

"You know best. But take care of yourself. Get downtown. The Bronx is wide open tonight. Everybody that ever shook Pete Malden's hand is calling him nine kinds of a skunk now. You don't belong up here any more."

"I guess not. You expecting trouble?"

"Well—" the officer paused— "we won't be overcome with astonishment."

Joe went on. Well, he told himself, so even the cops were wise. What a sweet position to be in!

Then he thought of the friends of Pete Malden, who were calling him nine varieties of a skunk. He cursed them, and beat at the wheel with his fist in helpless rage. Maybe he was taking it entirely too much to heart, for one on whom Malden had so little claim; but a feeling of loyalty cherished for months can do strange things to a man. Providing, always, that he's the sort of man that Joe Russell was. He knew, as a wise New Yorker, that his job was to mind his own business in the first place. Had the dead man been anybody else he would have done so. He was simply obeying an impulse too imperious to be denied. He was being himself.

And Joe Russell was finding out strange new things about himself as the hours wore on.

ON BUSY Southern Boulevard Joe noticed with growing irritation that a yellow roadster was driving recklessly close to him in the roadway. Joe moved in closer to the curb. The other machine followed. It acted in a most eccentric manner. Then suddenly it shot ahead a few feet, cut the wheels to the right, and Joe was forced to slam on the brakes mightily to avoid collision. Both machines came to an instant dead stop.

"What the hell!" Joe shouted. "You damn fool, must you wreck both cars?"

A man got out of the roadster and ran back swiftly.

"You're Joe Russell, ain't you? Well, keep on going up the Boulevard real slow till we give you the horn to turn. You're coming with us."

"Oh," said Joe, suddenly calm and interested. "I am, am I?"

"You bet you are. Do as you're told. I needn't talk to you."

Joe was astonished, in a detached manner, at the calm, the inner light that flooded his thoughts. There was no fear or panic, merely a lightning survey of every implication the situation contained. And a swift decision. He was going with them. He was going to make no effort to escape them. If they thought they had him intimidated, the misapprehension was but a weapon in his hands.

"O. K," he said. "Take it easy. There's no call for excitement."

The other smiled from the side of his mouth.

"Don't start any, then. I got a bad heart."

"I know how they are. Terrible, ain't it?"

The fellow darted back to the roadster. The low car moved from the path, and a hand signaled Joe to advance before them. He did so, and continued up Southern Boulevard at a leisurely pace while the roadster purred close behind.

And as he drove, Joe Russell made provisions for a certain dire contingency.

The Greenlock Hotel is little known below the Harlem River, but any resi-

dent above, driving by in the family flivver, will point it out with pride. It is a modern hostelry, and prosperous. Visiting kings and nabobs never take up quarters there while in New York, perhaps, but the Greenlock does not miss them. It has a regal clientele all its own.

Joe marveled at the assurance of his escorts as they entered. The two men took positions on either side of him, and were quite casual, almost friendly. It should certainly be a simple matter for any one thus trapped to arouse the lobby with clamorous cries for aid. Bellhops darted about; a bland clerk idled behind the desk; benign matrons gathered in groups among the great upholstered chairs. But Joe had no illusions. Nothing other than a machine gun could pry him loose from that pair.

They mounted in an elevator to an upper floor, walked along a silent corridor and, after knocking, passed through a door. Joe found himself in the anteroom of a suite, and had a glimpse of chambers beyond. They proceeded directly through, and came to a halt in a sitting room where, lounging on a table edge, toying with a highball and talking to another man, they found Steve Lasky.

Joe stood in the center of the room, facing Lasky with narrowed eyes and a defiantly out thrust jaw. There was a trace of a smile on his lips. Lasky eyed him with arrogant humor, and listened to the tale of his capture. Joe gained the inference from the story that all upper New York was being scoured for him that night.

"Well, rat," said Lasky, "you didn't put it over, did you?"

"Didn't I? I hadn't heard," Joe returned. "What do you mean? Put what over?"

"I'm not quite sure yet just what." Lasky, a tall, beautifully framed man with black hair and smoky eyes and a nose of imperious strength, was enjoying himself. He spoke with a deliberate, half snarling voice in which was the taunt of the victor. He addressed his henchmen. "Frisk him."

"Joe Russell's reformed!" said one of the pair, grinning. "Ain't you heard?"

"Frisk him anyway."

They did. They passed sensitive hands over his pockets, beneath his armpits, across the small of his back. They shrugged eloquently.

"Nothing doing, Chief."

"All right," said Lasky. He sipped at his glass. "Now, Joe Russell, tell us what's the idea of your squeal? It ought to be interesting, because I can't figure it out."

"Why talk?" said Joe, evidently bored. "You know more about it than I do."

Lasky grinned. It was almost a grin of benevolence. He was like a great cat basking in the light of his own power and cunning.

"Boy, and you'd be surprised if you knew how much I do know! Right this minute I've got you crucified!" The last word was venomous.

"You have?" Joe drew a package of cigarets from his pocket and lighted one. "I could have crucified you beautifully myself a while ago—if I'd wanted to."

"Why didn't you then? You tried."

"Oh, no!" Joe smiled indulgently. "Remember, there were two other guys in my cab with Pete Malden. They weren't as drunk as they made out, but they had plenty liquor in them. They were talkative. And how they talked! You'd be surprised yourself, Lasky!"

Steve Lasky studied Joe quietly. He disbelieved him, but there was a large enough possibility of truth in the words to give him pause.

"Talked about what?"

"Well—" Joe reflected. "About beating it back West in a hurry. About the lot of saps the New York mobs were. About what a cinch it was to jack you up to twice the money you meant to pay. Several things like that."

"They did, eh?"

Lasky looked about at his lieutenants, an enormous grin gathering on his face. The men grinned back, hugely enjoying some secret shared between them.

"Boy, wait till they try to pass that

extra grand in phony bills!" said Lasky. He laughed, and took a turn up and down the room, shaking his head, exceedingly pleased with his stratagem.

Within Joe mounted a keen but subdued exultation. He had struck out in the dark—and hit the bull's-eye. He had given Lasky reason to credit his statement. He looked about him. The other men—there were four besides Lasky and himself—reflected the hard good humor and assurance of their leader. One sat on a couch, another stood beside a window, and Joe's captors remained behind him. There were, Joe observed quickly, two windows in the room, and two doors. Evidently the room did duty as sleeping quarters on occasion, for the second door, half open, gave him a glimpse of the gleaming white tiles which indicated a bathroom. His gaze returned to Lasky.

"Well, if that's all they had to say," the latter was observing, "I don't blame you for not talking about it. I still can't see where you could have crucified me."

"No? Just for instance, take this yarn about those boys coming from Chicago. The cops believe it. I don't; I know better."

Lasky frowned. He glanced sidewise at Joe; came close.

"Have you told anybody where they came from?"

"Yes!" Joe spat out the word. "I have."

"Who?"

"Find out!"

Lasky continued to stare into Joe's eyes for a minute, while passion kindled in his own pupils. Then he turned away.

"Dan," he said to the man on the couch, "take a cab and run over as far west as Broadway. Go to a phone booth. Call St. Louis. Give them the office. No names, mind!"

"O. K, Chief." The man came quickly to his feet, grabbed a hat from the table and went out.

"As for you, rat," Lasky said to Joe, "I've heard all I want to know. You can go now. These boys will take you along." He exchanged a glance of subdued significance with the two guards. "All right, beat it!"

"Have it your way," said Joe compliantly. He felt an exceeding calm come over him. He glanced down at his feet. A shoe lace trailed on the carpet. He lifted the foot. "You seem to be the doctor tonight, Lasky. Wait just a minute till I tie this."

He walked to the couch against the wall, and placed the foot on the upholstery. Lasky glanced at him, then returned to his drink. The three other men watched Joe Russell, waiting.

JOE was deliberate about the task. He tied the lace precisely, giving the bows a jerk in conclusion to make the knot fast. Then he drew up the cuff of the trouser so that the whiteness of his leg was exposed. Thrust down in the elastic garter circling his calf, its muzzle just beneath the edge of the sock, a compact revolver nestled against the flesh. It came away in his hand, and Joe sprang to the side.

"Up with 'em! Damn you, nobody takes me for a ride tonight!" His eyes flamed with fighting fury, and his lips were twisted in a snarl.

Lasky leaped behind the table, pulling it over. The man by the window froze. One of the guards clawed at his coat pocket, cursing. Joe pulled trigger, and the man wheeled abruptly about with the shot, abandoning his effort. The second guard threw his hands high in air.

Behind the table Lasky went into action. His gun struck the top of the board and spat flame simultaneously with Joe's second shot. Joe's bullet left a neat little hole in the smooth wood. Another appeared beside it, and a third, in quick succession.

The man by the window came out of his trance and made a frantic grab for his own weapon. The guard with elevated hands suddenly seized his wounded companion, and holding the man before him, went for his own gun. Behind the up-

turned table nothing could be seen of Lasky's movements.

Joe turned, darted into the bathroom, slammed the door and turned the bolt. He had one shot left in his revolver. He took in the tiny room at a glance and sprang for the bathtub. He threw himself flat within it. The panels of the door would offer small hindrance to the passage of the hail of lead he had every reason to expect, but the substantial metal walls of the tub should turn it aside effectively.

There was one bullet left. It would serve for the first man to enter the little room if the door were broken down.

After that sudden burst of shots, which seemed to tear asunder the very air in which he stood, the silence was painful. Action is its own anodyne; passiveness is agony. The metal tub seemed like a reflector to magnify the pounding of Joe's heart. He waited, minute after minute. Nothing happened.

There was the sound of sobbing in the other room after a time. Or was it cursing? It was low, the voice of a life at the ebb. Joe listened, uncertain. At length he got up, and stepped silently out of the tub. He quickly flattened himself against the wall beside the door, and cocked an ear. He could make nothing of what he heard.

There was no keyhole in the door, no transom to peer over. Gripping the gun, Joe was undecided. Over against the side wall there was a narrow window. But it opened many floors above the street. It offered no aid.

Joe spoke. He called to the outer room, cursing, defiant. No answer came. He took his nerve in hand and pressed an ear to the door. His hand went slowly to the bolt. His whole being was a-quiver with the question: What was happening on the other side of these thin panels?

Slowly, so as to give no warning, he slid the bolt. He gripped the knob, and turned. He paused again; then thrust the door abruptly open.

The room was empty!

A sense of the incredible was on him as Joe walked out of the bathroom into what had been for one brief moment Armageddon. Not a soul was in sight where so short a time ago his executioners had gathered. He paused in the middle of the room, struck with wonder.

Then he perceived that his impression of solitude was mistaken. Over by the entrance lay a man. It was the guard who first had fallen. He lay still where he had dragged himself in an effort to elude the death that crept like a crushing weight over his frame. It was this man Joe had heard. No one would ever hear him again.

Joe walked to the table and peered over the upturned edge. On the carpet behind it Steve Lasky was spread grotesquely, lying on his back, gun in hand. Precisely in the center of his forehead was a discolored hole.

"Well, big shot!" said Joe slowly. "I guess you and Pete Malden can get together now and settle the details between yourselves."

A door slammed somewhere outside. Joe whirled, gun leveled. There were voices, the tread of many hurrying feet. He waited.

And into the room came a squad of bluecoats, grimly eager, prepared for trouble. They paused, and perhaps were a little disappointed, at the sight of a slender, keen eyed young man standing beside an overturned table with hands in air, smiling.

IN INSPECTOR McCarthy's private office at headquarters next day Joe Russell made himself comfortable in the chair and puffed on his newly lighted cigar. He continued to listen.

"And another thing," the grizzled veteran was saying, "you know what you went and done? You ruined the biggest conviction that's come along since the Becker case! It probably would have meant a couple of new inspectorships, for the force, and maybe a governorship for the D. A. Man, Lasky was a prize! And you bumped him off!"

"Think you could have gotten around to convicting him?"

The officer grimaced ruefully.

"Oh, hell, I suppose not, to talk sense! If we had your St. Louis tip before, and a chance to trace every telephone call going through long distance during a certain hour, like we did last night, maybe we could have."

"You'd never have the chance while Lasky was alive. Once they saw he was dead those boys wasted no minutes on me. They scattered, far and wide."

"We picked up a couple in the stations," said the inspector. "Maybe we can chisel some additional dope out of them. But as I said, the case is ruined now."

"Ain't it a shame!" mocked Joe.

"Well," continued the officer with grinning resignation, "my kick is only professional. I'm glad you horned in, damn fool and all that you were to do it. We'll go before a magistrate tomorrow and fix up that little matter of carrying concealed weapons—and while we're at it, release you from your bail bond. You may have to tell a few things yet to a grand jury, but that'll be about all."

"O. K. with me!"

The inspector studied Joe with knitted brows.

"I want to ask you a question, boy. Just why did you pick hacking for a living?"

Joe shrugged.

"I can make money at it. I don't want to work between four walls."

"Did you ever think of joining the force?"

Joe frowned.

"Why do you ask me that? I've always been a bad egg to you guys."

"Frankly, I wouldn't have asked it a week ago. You were still a bad egg then, only a quiet one. You got rid of a whole lot of notions these last few days. I know men, and I'd like to see you come in with us."

"I wouldn't mind," said Joe. He hesitated. "But—"

The officer rose.

"I know just what you're going to say. Go on home with you, and tell the little woman all about it. We'll stand by what she says. I think I can guess. And good luck to you!"

Joe got up and took the other's hand.

"Thanks a lot. I'll do just that. And am I right with the department now?"

"Your stock's sky high! Go ahead, beat it. It's twelve noon, and you should be home in fifteen minutes. And listen—if any donkey gives you a ticket for speeding on the way, just call me up and I'll bust him!"

"There ain't one on the force could catch me today!" said Joe.

He waved a hand cheerfully, and was gone. The door slammed with surprising abruptness in his wake. The inspector grinned, returned to the desk, and lighted himself another cigar. He wore the air of a man satisfied with a job well done.

STRANGE ISLANDS *of the* CHINA SEA

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

ON THE little island of Y'Ami, just south of Formosa, is a magnificent herd of wild Holstein cattle whose progenitors are thought to be stock seized by pirates from merchant vessels and put ashore on this desolate stretch of sandy beach. It is a mystery how these animals exist, as Y'Ami during the dry season of six months is waterless. Common report among seafaring men who traverse the China Sea has it that the cattle of Y'Ami are able to drink sea water.

In confirmation of this is the fact that in the Sulu Archipelago are a few small islands, waterless as well, but serving as the home of roving herds of cattle. Some years ago a portion of these herds was rounded up to be shipped to Manila. All died en route, although the voyage occupied but a few days. The cattle refused to drink the fresh water provided for them.

That goats can exist and fatten on plants and grasses containing minute supplies of liquid is proven by the *cabras* which inhabit a small island near Camaguin, off the northern coast of Luaon. Once a year these goats are thinned out by natives of the mainland who use great care in their hunting, because of the cobras which are so numerous and which do not seem to molest the goats.

Here again an interesting question arises. If the island is waterless for six months out of the year, how can the serpents survive? Again rumor is rife. Natives claim that the serpents suckle the goats, thus obtaining the fluid so necessary to their existence.

One tiny nameless island in the Philippines lying just to the north of Ambil and within sixty miles of Manila possesses a sparkling spring, but is destitute of human inhabitants and given over to serpents, among which are many cobras Not long ago a *battel*—a sailing craft of the schooner type—was becalmed for several days in the vicinity of this snake haunted Eden. Water was running low, and the captain sent several sailors ashore with kegs in order to secure a supply. The spring was found without difficulty, but the brown men reported that they had a severe battle with snakes, big and little, who lay coiled on the rocks close by.

On the island of Babuyan, which has seldom felt the white man's foot, is a strange lake, venomous to man or beast. Its peculiar poisoning properties are unknown, but its waters are a vivid blue, and along its banks are hundreds of skeletons of birds, serpents and wood rats that have quenched their thirst only to die. *Babuya* —wild pigs from which the island takes its name—recognize the evil which lurks in this beautiful jungle lake and instinctively avoid it.

Babuyan itself deserves a word in regard to its gigantic wood rats which are as large as the average domestic cat, and possess fur an inch and a half thick. Every night the serpents which infest the island hunt rats and wild chickens as food, the hour being invariably from seven to eight. The squeaking of the rats, the squawking of the frightened fowl, and the snapping of the bamboos as the larger pythons writhe among them cause a devilish pandemonium never to be forgotten by those who have heard it.

Some day perhaps adventurous trappers will systematically clear out the rats of Babuyan. Tropical fur for my lady's winter coat would be a novelty. *Quien sabe?*

Conclusion of a Novel

THE DARK ROAD

By

HUGH PENDEXTER

HIS natural American sympathies aroused by the stories he heard of the bravery and fortitude of the patriot army, and loathing the feverish dissipation he found at Plumstead, the family seat of his powerful Tory kinsmen, the Doanes, young Enos Halwood quit the place to join the colors. With his pretty cousin Nancy his only confidante, he set out alone for General Washington's camp at White Marsh.

General Washington suggested that Halwood could be of more service in Philadelphia, related as he was to Moses Doane and his reckless, hard riding brothers, who had won their way into the British inner circle by the steady stream of horses they kept pouring into the English camp from the already impoverished countryside.

Halwood agreed to the plan and, as an American spy, returned to the city, where he arranged to be contacted by one of Washington's privates, a lovable knave named Sam Lydyg, whom he had rescued some time before from the hands of Captain Shatil, a notorious highwayman.

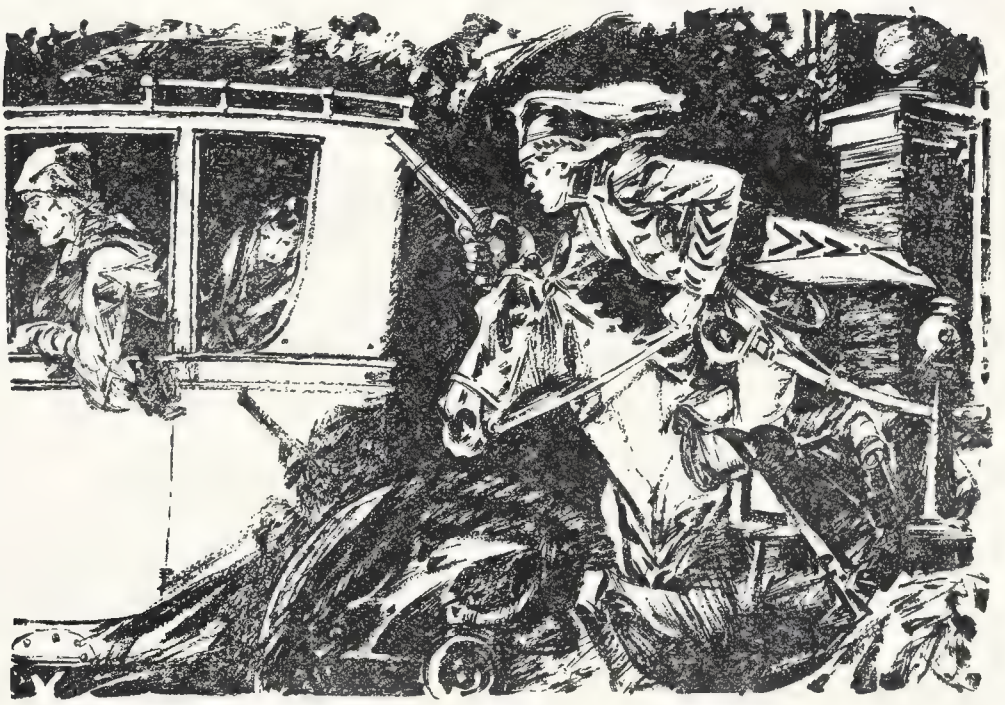
In the city Halwood immediately fell under the dread surveillance of "Howe's Ferret", Blidgett—a ghastly, corpse-like man who was head of the British intelligence.

"I smell rebel!" was the Ferret's salutation upon meeting the young American.

But through the influence of Major André, a friend of his kinsmen the Doanes, Halwood secured an appointment in Blidgett's very branch of the British service—the intelligence. Thus Enos Halwood became a spy in two armies.

Further to allay the suspicions of Blidgett, Halwood took lodgings in the house of an eccentric named Kinney, where the Ferret himself lived—with

of the American Revolution



his great, panther-like black hound.

One day in the City Tavern Moses Doane returned to his cousin letters Halwood had written Nancy. Puzzled by her action, Halwood tore the incriminating documents to pieces. A few minutes later he sought them—and found the fragments gone.

Correctly surmising what had happened, Halwood went to Blidgett's rooms, where he successfully gained entrance after killing the fierce brute the Ferret always kept on guard. His letters there, Halwood burned them—and the shadow of the Ferret loomed darker before the American. The world seemed to be toppling about Halwood indeed when, upon coming to the city, Nancy Doane cut him.

Halwood was then detailed to Washington's camp. Rightly concluding the move to be a test of his loyalty to the King, he was careful to give correct, if unimportant, information to Red Schles —a British spy in the camp—for relay to Philadelphia.

When the Americans moved into winter quarters at Valley Forge, Halwood returned to the city.

Meanwhile Sam Lydyg had not been idle. Upon overhearing Red Schles boast he would soon cook the goose of some one, Lydyg, surmising the intended victim to be Enos Halwood, made friendly overtures to the British spy. Succeeding in loosening the fellow's tongue with liquor, and learning definitely that Halwood was under suspicion, Lydyg acted. As Red Schles, realizing that he had said too much, suddenly whipped out a knife, Lydyg swung the heavy rum bottle from which they had been drinking—bringing it crashing down on the red head thrusting toward him . . .

THERE was no gold in the man's pocket, and no pass written by Blidgett in the shoe, when Red Schles was pushed off the wharf soon afterward.

Breathing deeply, Lydyg stuffed the duck deep under the tier of planking and hurled the bottle into the water. By devious ways he returned to the vicinity of the tavern and, in a circuitous path, gained Halwood's old room. Drawing the curtain closely to hide the light of the candle he placed on the floor, he changed his coat, waistcoat and shirt; the force of the stabbing blow had caused the point of the knife to puncture his garments.

Lying on the floor, he proceeded to study Blidgett's handwriting. It was the most curious specimen of chirography the cleverest thief ever attempted to imitate. The letters had angles, instead of curves. Each line resembled, in Lydyg's excited fancy, a string of tiny skeletons, some dancing, some prone, but always skeletons. Shifting the candle to the table, he took writing material and experimented. For two hours he studied, analyzed and practised. By the time he was ready to burn the evidence in the fireplace he felt well satisfied with his endeavors. He wrote a pass for himself and concealed it in the lining of his coat collar, and carefully replaced the loosened stitches. One for Halwood quickly followed, with a space left for the date. Then he returned to the tavern and was very efficient in attending to the wants of late revelers.

During the afternoon of the following day Halwood entered the city and stabled his mare. He made directly for the tavern, walking for a part of the way behind a group of prisoners and deserters who were being conducted to headquarters. They were easily distinguished, as the deserters had arms, which they would be permitted to sell. Both recreant and captive would be given an opportunity to enlist, and the latter, if refusing, would be sent to the Provost. Nearly all the group were half naked, nearly shoeless, and wearing a dirty blanket, tied at the waist, for shirt and coat. Their appearance advertised the plight of the American army.

Halwood exchanged nods and greetings with several officers, but saw nothing of De Lancey and André, the two he liked most. At the tavern he found his old table empty. He barely was seated before Lydyg was bustling in, politely greeting—

"Glad to see you back, sir."

"It seems good to be back, Lydyg. You know how I prefer my chops. I'll have some coffee at once. I'm famously hungry."

"Yes, sir. You look much thinner, if I may say so, sir . . . Schles came yesterday— And toast?"

"With the chops— Where is he?'

"In the river . . . Your old room after you've eaten."

This startling piece of information removed a heavy load from the Virginian's mind. It barely registered on his comprehension before the familiar figure of the master spy came through the doorway and advanced to the table.

Halwood smiled a greeting and kicked out a chair. Blidgett's forehead, the color of old ivory, developed three little creases. In his hissing undertone he demanded—

"Why do you return without my orders?"

"Because of General Wayne's orders."

"Their nature?"

"To spy on you, sir."

The deep eyes flared.

"So they have learned to fear me! Where is the man called Schles?"

"Here, I suppose. He left twenty-four hours ahead of me, and I'm just arrived."

"I know he entered the town," said Blidgett. "I was curious to know if you had met him."

"I have not seen him. The waiters may have seen him."

"The fool was to report to me. Here you, sirrah!" This to Lydyg, who was entering with a tray. The cleverest thief came forward rapidly. Blidgett continued, "Have you seen a red headed

man, known as Schles, within the last twenty-four hours?"

Lydyg shook his head.

"Sometimes I see men with red hair, but I don't know their names."

Blidgett waited until Halwood's breakfast was on the table and the waiter had withdrawn, when he inquired—

"Your most important piece of news?"

"The American army goes into quarters in Valley Forge at once."

Blidgett fished out a small map, neatly drawn in ink, which showed the environs of Philadelphia and the surrounding country, including the camp at White Marsh. Halwood promptly extended it, drawing imaginary lines with his finger, pointing out the location of the little valley. He added:

"The staff quite generally condemned this choice. Baron De Kalb was very outspoken."

"Baron, forsooth! I knew him when he was a butler," sneered Blidgett. "But they are fools. The arch rebel is as wise as the devil in selecting that spot. We can't get in. If we did they would hide in the timber among the hills. If we gave chase, their riflemen would shoot us to pieces. Who first suggested you should spy on me?"

"General Wayne. They talked much about you. They call you the eyes of the army. They believe you have an uncanny knack of procuring information."

The Ferret tilted his head and laughed noiselessly.

"Eyes of the army, eh? Not so bad for a rebel. They might have said, 'of a blind army.' I'm almost sorry you're here. Two reasons. I understand you are *non grata* at headquarters."

Halwood was puzzled.

"Why should any general officer care if I come or go?"

"What if a certain young lady wished you away?" asked Blidgett.

Halwood's face paled. In a hoarse voice he said—

"If it's come to that pass, petticoat government, I can't leave town too quickly."

"Nay. I have not said that." Now the Ferret's voice was harsh and grinding. "No woman yet, and many have tried, ever succeeded in extinguishing my authority. A man of high rank may listen at times, while pretty lips complain of the death's head at the feast, and wish another, and a younger, man be sent into exile. I am still at the head of the intelligence bureau. In a certain state of mind our gentleman of high degree might be willing to grant almost any request. Fortunately I have a *quid pro quo*. The young lady would not care to bargain on my terms."

"The last is meaningless to me, of course."

"And I was giving you credit for shrewdness. I could hang her brother for his stealings; for the several games he has played on the commissariat. I could hang several of her brothers before headquarters knew they were looking down from the gibbet. Damn them for so many thieving scoundrels!"

"You spoke of two reasons why you were almost sorry to find me here. What's the second? I'm here at your orders."

The Ferret straightened and stared steadily across into Halwood's eyes for a fraction of minute; but the Virginian's gaze remained curious, not alarmed. The immoble lips seemed striving to writhe and twist. With a blaze of heat in his voice Blidgett replied—

"Something that once was a dog, I believe, has been dug up on the corner of the grounds where Mistress Doane now lives in state."

Halwood's brows contracted in bewilderment, although his heart felt cold.

"Something you believe to be a dog! But don't you know, if you're interested? And what of it? A dead dog is better buried than to be thrown into the river."

"Some corrosive, probably quicklime, was used in that interment," said Blidgett. "That means an attempt at concealment. It was a dog. I'm convinced it was my lost pet, Satan. Some one fired a shot at me from that end of the

Doane grounds. The girl hadn't arrived. But the Doane men were quartered there. Some one tried to shoot me—the afternoon I told you how lucky you were to have been gambling when the shot was fired. Else I would have believed it to be you."

Halwood gave a little gesture of impatience.

"Your talk goes in a circle. It leads nowhere," he frankly criticised. "You've lost a dog. *Ergo* the dog was shot and buried by a Doane. You think you find its remains buried on the Doane grounds. You believe some one tried to shoot you. *Ergo*, I might have been that person. But you decide it's one of the Doanes; *ergo*, I am innocent. I am surprised that one so astute should indulge in such foolish reasoning."

Blidgett attempted to speak, but seemed to encounter some impediment. His voice was scarcely audible as he rose and said:

"Quite correct. What matters when only a *dog* is dead. I feel that way often when the loose earth is tossed on—the *dog*."

HALWOOD did not attempt to see Nancy Doane. Two days of loitering about the streets and in eating houses, with occasional talks with several friendly officers, informed him that the Bucks County maid was the toast of gallants and the envy of town belles. Twice he saw her pass in her coach, her state as impressive as the lavish use of gold could produce. He could not understand such a metamorphosis. She was the last, he had supposed, who would find any appeal in the riotous life of Philadelphia, with General Howe setting the pace; and, for the thoughtless, making immorality and gambling respectable. Public opinion pictured her as the latest lure for Sir William, and represented that august person as being quite beside himself because of her independence.

Her equipage and mansion were supplied by Moses Doane, who lavished luxuries upon her with the positive belief such outlays would return to him manifold. Even her jealous rivals could not point to town house, or jewels, and say they were gifts from Sir William. People in the street, however, believed to the contrary.

The second time Halwood saw her, she detected him among the gaping citizens and soldiers, and instinctively leaned forward to look more closely; then she was quite the grand dame again, her pretty head held high, her gaze supercilious. Moses had attempted to live up to the mansion, and bloomed violently in gay apparel which would have captured the heart of a troubadour. More sober garb would have become his huge stature better. He had learned the wisdom of strenuously suppressing his brothers, and had driven the tribe back to Plumstead, permitting rare visits only to town. Too many Doanes could spoil his game; and he even kept himself in the background, now that experience had taught its lesson.

If he spent lavishly, he also took down royal profits. Roulette and faro games suffered a drop in earnings now that Moses was hunting gold with the zest of a Blidgett tracking down a traitor. Gambling was the rage, with the commander-in-chief its high priest. Moses was an expert in all games of chance, and when honest cleverness did not suffice, he could resort to cheating with a finesse that defied complaint even if it could not always allay suspicion. Also, he possessed the great good sense not to seek social, or other, advancement on the strength of his sister's popularity. Consequently he was thought well of at headquarters. He always was in the background, yet never obtrusive. He was always his sister's escort, which was not so pleasing.

Halwood met him one afternoon in the Indian King Tavern and joined him in a cup of coffee. Moses was embarrassed and almost apologetic. He awkwardly attempted to explain:

"That time you were at the house, and Nancy cut up so like the devil. I never could learn what was the matter with her.

I'd liked her to be more neighborly, you understand."

"I believe I understand," said Halwood.

"No fine feathers, or soft speeches, can turn her head," Moses insisted. "If I hadn't known that to be a fact I'd never have fetched her to town. But, kinsman, between you'n' me, it's a mighty good investment. I'm two thousand pounds ahead of the game already."

"Your furnishings cost you but little," Halwood commented dryly.

Moses smiled broadly, as if complimented, and continued:

"My biggest expenses are behind me. You probably know the Britishers gave certificates for everything in food and stock they took on the way to this town. With FitzPatrick as my partner, and attending to sending in certificates to be redeemed, we'll clear over six thousand clean profit before the game runs out."

"Then you must be counterfeiting the certificates and affixing bogus names," said Halwood.

"Exactly. I want to be fair to both sides. I counterfeit American currency and the English certificates. Red Bank was a godsend to Fitz and me. The several officers killed, along with Count Donop, can't come back and deny their signatures. Donop, dead, has been worth 'most a thousand pounds to us already. That Lydyg is a clever customer. He imitated the signatures of half a dozen officers so near that I'll defy the devil himself to tell which from t'other."

Halwood made a mental note of this. Moses continued:

"I'd like mortal well to have you up to the house, but no man can understand a woman. Nance must think she has a reason for taking a dislike to you; or else she's afraid you'll think the wrong thing. Who knows?" He paused and stared questioningly. Halwood's face was blank. Moses continued, "I'll swear that none of this fine feathers business has gone to her head. Yet I'm still puzzled to understand why she gave in of a sudden, and agreed to come here. She's a fine girl."

"A most beautiful lady," said Halwood.

"To hell with the lady stuff! She's a good girl," belligerently insisted Moses. "I'm no fool. I know there must be some talk, as there always is when Sir William looks at a woman. But Nance is a Doane. She keeps her head. Sir William keeps his place."

"You are using her as bait, so you may feather your nest," coldly accused Halwood.

"Damme! You couldn't put it better if you tried a hundred years," agreed Moses admiringly.

"Moses, be careful. You can plot and scheme; but you can't outwit headquarters. Even now Howe's Ferret is on your trail."

Moses' strong face was transformed into a scowling mask. He mumbled—

"I'll take that unburied dead man and break his neck over my knee."

"He has broken the necks of those much higher than you. He uses a noose and a gibbet. Be careful, Moses. Very careful."

"Oh, this game will be played out inside of six months. I'm cashing in and taking my profits. One of these days the whole tribe of us will disappear overnight."

"Don't wait too long," warned Halwood. "Don't tarry till the game is closed. When the English go, there will be the Americans. They will seek a reckoning with you for giving aid and support to the enemy."

Moses scowled. There was the edge of trouble in his voice as he insisted—

"The rebels must lose!"

"When? Where? The worst two years are behind them. What has Howe accomplished? Or Burgoyne? What victories were won at Boston? True, they hold New York, but they were outgamed and thoroughly beaten across the river in the Jerseys. Howe is here. He has accomplished that much. He holds this city; but the Americans, lacking everything a soldier should have, make their winter camp under his nose. He will

leave this city as he has abandoned others. Perhaps he will go to Charleston for awhile. Life to him is just a good time."

"Damme! But there's meat in your talk," agreed Moses. "His brother, the admiral—Black Dick, the sailors call him—is mighty impatient that something be done. I think I'll give five hundred or a thousand pounds to Washington's army, when I believe there is a chance of Howe quitting Philadelphia. Where's that death's head today?"

"He was at the tavern this morning. I'd like to know where he is. Suppose you learn from one of the officers at headquarters and send me word. I'll be at the tavern."

Moses agreed. The conversation had created some apprehension in his mind. Did the Ferret get on his track in earnest there was much pilfering from the military chest that might be traced to the counterfeit certificates, now being plentifully supplied by Captain FitzPatrick.

The encounter also left Halwood with a new fear in his heart. He hastened back to the tavern and waited until he could glimpse Lydyg and signal to him with a slight gesture. Then he went to his old room. In ten minutes the cleverest thief was noiselessly crossing the threshold, his shrewd face both curious and apprehensive. Halwood berated him for participating in the certificate forgeries.

"All I've got, and will git, I'll give to our army, sir," the man offered as a defense.

"Will that save your neck once Blidgett learns what you've done?" sternly demanded the Virginian.

Lydyg's keen gaze wavered.

"Then I'll quit. But there's no way of old Blidgett suspecting me unless Doane bleats. If he does that I'll say he's a liar."

"It all worries me," said Halwood. "Even now I have an important bit of work to do, and I must wait to learn where Blidgett is. I need your help. I need two or three hours—though perhaps much less time will do—without any fear of being interrupted by him."

"I'll find out, sir," offered Lydyg. "I must go back to the tavern first. Then I'll go on a scout."

Any inquiry proved to be unnecessary, however. When the two, by separate paths, had reached the tavern, Halwood found Moses Doane in the barroom, drinking raw brandy. There was open dismay in the rugged face. Drawing Halwood aside, the head of the Doanes hoarsely reported:

"The bony devil has gone to Chester County! Think he'll find out anything?"

"I shall expect him to find out everything."

"Then Nance must save us!"

"Wagering her against Blidgett!" snarled Halwood. "You'd sell her to save your hide!"

"Damn lie!" retorted Moses, as he wiped the nervous sweat from his face. "But she can hold up the game until I can ride for it."

"And can she ride for it, after giving you a safe start? Or is she to be left, a lost wager?"

"Curse it, no! I'll swing first! But what can I do?"

Halwood was thinking rapidly of the immediate task ahead. For some time he had wished for a clear field, for an opportunity to test his strong suspicions. Speaking more calmly, he said:

"You do nothing till you hear from me. You play chess?"

"Nancy tried to teach me. All damn nonsense. What's chess got to do with getting out of this pickle?"

"There is a such a thing as checkmate," reminded Halwood. "You must keep calm and wait. I'll soon know if I'm right or wrong in my reasoning."

CHAPTER XIV

CHECKMATE

NERO, the slave, was at the back of the Kinney house, burning some rubbish. His kinky wool was tied up with bits of colored ribbon, which were guaranteed by an aged witch doctor to be a strong *juju* medicine against malev-

olent spirits. Fear had accumulated horrors in his simple mind until the sound of his own steps, reechoing through the mansion, became the footfalls of shadowy pursuers. For two nights he had slept outside the house, rolled in a blanket, under the hedge. Now night was just behind the horizon and the thought of returning indoors terrified him.

He did not attempt to reason. Generations of firm belief in the existence of demons was his racial heritage. The white man had said the west wind made the chimney smoke. Naturally, it followed, the west wind must be the voice of the particular devil assigned by a bigger devil to haunt the house. As he furtively stole glances through the smoke of the fire at the windows he saw many evil faces peering at him. The ghosts were in ambush. Nothing could induce him to rest under the roof-tree that night.

It was while the black was thus engaged that Halwood reconnoitered the mansion, and waited until Lydyg joined him.

"The African is burning rubbish out back. Now is the time," said Halwood. He crossed the street and made for the front door.

"Sure Kinney isn't inside?" Lydyg asked nervously.

"If he is, he won't interrupt our work," was the grim reply.

"Just what is our work?" asked Lydyg.

Halwood gently closed the door behind them and began ascending the stairs. The interior of the place was close to darkness. It was not until mounting to the third floor that he answered his companion's question, saying:

"I am trying to prove a theory. We'll see if I guessed right. You fetched candles?"

"Half a dozen. It would be mighty bad if old Blidgett happened to return at this time."

"Might be bad for Blidgett—yes."

Lydyg halted at the door of his companion's room, but the Virginian continued to the foot of the ladder and confidently ascended. Lydyg tripped over a tray of food, left by the slave, cursed under his breath, and paused to see what happened when the trap was raised. Then, ashamed of his hesitance, he ran up the ladder nimbly and stood beside Halwood in the observatory. Resting a hand on the telescope, Halwood remarked:

"One can sweep this glass around and see things not in the heavens. It brings the rear of the Doane grounds, and a section of Howe's grounds, to within a few feet of your eyes."

"If your're going to play that game, why a candle?"

Halwood shook his head, and surprised his companion by pulling out the dresser, thereby revealing the dark opening in the wall. Crouching before this, he directed:

"Wait till I give the word, then follow carefully. Your feet should find the rungs."

He lowered himself through the opening until only his head and shoulders were visible. He warned:

"The ladder goes straight down. Sort of a well. Either an abandoned chimney, and a big one, or a ventilating stack."

"Aye. It has to go down, as it can't go up," dubiously whispered the cleverest thief. "But where does it end?"

"In the cellar, I suppose. Now I'm going. Pull the dresser back in place. It moves easily. Don't step on my hands."

He vanished, and Lydyg did as he had been directed. He found himself descending a perpendicular ladder inside an inky well. He maneuvered slowly, feeling with his feet to avoid stepping on his leader's head, or hands. The descent seemed to be interminable. Finally his feet came in welcome contact with the cellar floor, and he was standing beside Halwood. The latter directed:

"Bend low and follow me. You'll have to crawl for it."

Lydyg dropped on his hands and knees and discovered a lighter patch in the opaque darkness. He scrambled through it and sighed with relief when he could stand erect in the large cellar.

The darkness now was but faintly thinned by the twilight feeding through

the cellar windows. Lydyg complained:

"We could have come down the stairs. Nigger's outside. This is a devil of a roundabout way to get here."

"Yet the ladder has been used many times in the old days. Perhaps by smugglers, red seamen, and surely by the head of the British intelligence bureau." As he talked, Halwood was busily endeavoring to light a candle. "I had to prove my theory of a secret entrance to the glass room on the roof," he mumbled. "There! we have a flicker of light and will investigate."

He kept his body between the taper and the windows, although he had small fear of the black's spying, and began a close scrutiny of the wall. He followed one side for the length of the house, then across the front of the cellar and back to the rear wall. There appeared to be no breaks in the ancient foundations thus far, and he had exhausted three-fourths of the underpinning. As he began his study of the rear wall he whispered—

"It's in this stretch of rock, or underfoot."

"What is? Gold?"

"Something more exciting than gold. It's got to be here, somewhere, or I'm the most sadly fooled man in Philadelphia."

Where Halwood was standing the wall consisted of fairly well proportioned slabs of rock, presenting a quite even surface. Halwood was scowling, for he had developed a startling theory, and had grown to believe in it.

"It must be between this spot and the foot of the ladder," he muttered.

"If I was that nigger I'd be scared to stay here nights," grumbled Lydyg.

"He's scared a-plenty," assured Halwood. "But you shouldn't be. You have stayed in the Cumberly country house, where a man was murdered."

"But I didn't like it," was the grim reply. "Now, what is it?"

"These recesses, or bins, we've been passing, in the rock. Look like big ovens. Used for storing vegetables, most likely."

"I saw them when you held the candle inside the first one. What of it?" The cleverest thief was not enjoying the adventure and was inclined to be impatient.

"They are evenly spaced apart. There should be one here—and there is not."

Lydyg used his keen eyes sharply, and exclaimed softly:

"But there was one here! Hold the light closer! Look! It's been filled in with small rocks. The masonry looks quite new!"

HALWOOD moved the candle back and forth, and he believed his search had ended. Instead of roughly cut cubes of rock, the wall was composed of odds and ends, the whole being stoutly held together by a binder of lime, sand and hair. All chinks were plugged with the same material.

Lydyg held his breath for a bit, and then whispered—

"Going to look behind it?"

For an answer Halwood gave him the candle to hold, and then produced from under his coat a mason's hammer and a short drill. The head of the latter was covered with leather to muffle the sound of the blows, but there was no hiding the clicking sound of the drill's point as it encountered rock in biting through the plaster.

"Light another candle and look around for something we can use for a lever," he directed.

By the time he had dislodged the mortar from a larger crevice, Lydyg was back with a short crowbar, badly rusted, but none the less serviceable. Halwood seized it eagerly, thrust the end into the aperture and applied his full weight. Twice, thus, he exerted himself without avail. On the third trial a small area of the conglomerate moved.

"It's coming!" panted Halwood.

Lydyg gave some assistance with the drill. A bushel of the rubble suddenly was dislodged. There was a strong odor of lime and something else that caused Lydyg to give ground and grimace in horror.

Halwood thrust the candle into the opening and, although he was prepared, he staggered back and gave a little cry. Lydyg peered over his shoulder and yelped:

"Old man Kinney! Good God! But I saw him alive on the street only a few days ago!"

"Neither you, nor I, ever saw him alive, unless you were here when the British army took over the city," whispered Halwood.

"But how did you know where to look? Why did you know you would find *this?*" whispered Lydyg.

Halwood was too busy in replacing the loosened fragments to make any extended reply. As he restored the rubble as best he could he said:

"Did you see the mortal weapon, a dagger? It's like can not be found in all America!"

Then he was filling the chinks with pieces of the plaster. He worked rapidly for there was an uncanny horror in the thought of the doer of the evil deed suddenly appearing. After ten desperate minutes of work Halwood breathed more freely and took time to stand back and inspect his work. He decided that a casual observer in that vague light would not detect the violence done the wall. The telltale bits of plaster on the earthen floor were soon covered by scuffling loose dirt over them. Without a word Halwood replaced the maul and drill under his coat and pushed Lydyg toward the opening of the secret entrance.

Lydyg extinguished his candle and climbed with furious haste, as if escaping from some demon below. Halwood followed him more leisurely, but with his mind quailing as he pictured the ferocity of the murderer. He believed the Evil One himself scarcely could be more relentless in accomplishing his purpose.

It was not until the two had gained the observatory that either spoke. Then Halwood warned—

"We mustn't be seen by the slave leaving the house."

He took the lead in descending to the ground floor, and tiptoed to the partly opened door of the Kinney kitchen. He faintly heard the jargon that Nero firmly believed to be an anti-ghost song. The slave was still at the rear of the premises. Halwood glided back to the front door, opened it a crack and spied on the street. What citizens were abroad were giving their attention to a pitched battle between some drummer boys and town gamins at the lower end of the street. Several young bucks, bound for the Doane house, passed. The two investigators waited until these disappeared beyond a hedge, when they slipped outside and hurried in the opposite direction.

"What's it all mean?" whispered Lydyg.

"Not a word till we get to my old room. Take this drill and maul and get rid of them; then join me."

They separated, Lydyg making for the wharf, where from his hiding place in the lumber stacks he could hurl the two implements into the water without being seen.

Halwood had finished washing his hands free of all signs of manual labor, and was minutely inspecting his clothing to make sure no flakes of plaster remained to betray the gruesome business, when there came a soft rap at the door, and Lydyg glided in. His face was pale and his eyes glittered. His usually steady hand trembled a trifle as he placed a flask of liquor on the table, and advised—

"You need a drink?"

"You stole this!" accused Halwood.

"So help me! It was the same as given to me. I was in a hurry. Captain Long passed, and the top showed from the pocket of the great coat he was carrying over his arm. He was going riding somewhere and expected to be out late. The flask leaped into my pocket before I had time to think. Drink! Tell me what this damnable business means."

Halwood swallowed some of the liquor and motioned for Lydyg to be seated. Then he left the door ajar, so he might catch the sound of spying feet on the stairs and, in a whisper, said:

"Old man Kinney was a Whig. He was cracked about studying the stars. He searched the heavens for celestial signs of our success. Blidgett was quick to learn of his political bent, and that he lived alone, except for one servant, in the big house with the glassed-in room on the roof. Kinney's place was near headquarters. One can cut across the grounds and be at General Howe's mansion very quickly. Blidgett became acquainted with Kinney. He succeeded in hiring half of the house. The old man wanted gold. He took in Blidgett as a tenant. The two must have become friendly. Often they were seen together . . . Do you know, Lydyg, that after I came to town, while they were seen often, they never appeared together, I'm positive.

"One of Blidgett's first tasks was thoroughly to learn the house. He discovered the unused chimney, or ventilating shaft. He found a ladder installed, or he erected one, and made the opening into the cupola after Kinney's death."

"After Kinney's death!" repeated Lydyg in a whisper.

"BLIDGETT murdered the old man in cold blood to further his damnable business of spying. I have looked into Blidgett's room on the top floor. He has enough disguises to provide outfits for a dozen masked balls. Kinney's heavy beard, smothering his whole face; his thick thatch of hair, hanging to his shoulders and often over his eyes, must have prompted the crime. It was a simple task for such as Blidgett to impersonate the old man. He had learned all his victim's ways and manners.

"He knew Kinney was a patriot. It was a chance Blidgett could not let pass. He knew Kinney had contributed gold to our military chest, when gold was our very life blood. He kept up that part of Kinney's rôle. He wandered among the soldiers and officers, giving gold pieces, and learning what our army was doing and planning to do. He was in the white Marsh camp while I was there and left gold. He saw his spy, Red Schles, in his own character, and told me Schles was a man I could trust with messages to Howe's headquarters. As Kinney he spied on Mr. Blidgett's spies."

"But how came you to suspect what Kinney's old friends never have suspected?" whispered Lydyg. "He must have made friends."

"Many among patriots. With his hideous face concealed he could be affable enough. My suspicions, very wild ones, I'll admit, were aroused one day when Kinney entered the house and closed the trapdoor, his signal for not wishing to be disturbed. Then he was gone. And he did not pass down the stairs! I was in my room and Blidgett did not know it. I investigated and found the secret exit. 'Kinney' would come in, and Blidgett would go out. While Blidgett was out there was never a sign of life in the cupola. Blidgett would return to the house, and 'Kinney' would take to the street. While 'Kinney' was out no one ever saw Blidgett. It was a seesaw sort of life for the spy. I came to realize I never had proof that the two men were ever in the house at one and the same time."

"And he advised you to take a room there!" gasped Lydyg.

"Just as he must have asked other men he suspected; so he might spy on them. I was thick with the Doanes, and distantly related to them. They were Tories as much as raiders, and counterfeiters can be anything. That was in my favor. When I climbed to the cupola and talked of hiring a room from Kinney I was actually talking with Blidgett. My room and belongings were thoroughly searched within the first twenty-four hours."

"What next? Kill him, of course."

"That must be planned very carefully," warned Halwood. "He might be more dangerous dead than alive. Perhaps he took me in because he had heard that Nancy Doane was inclined to pity the American prisoners in the Provost."

"The fool probably thought you might be in love with her, and pattern your

politics after what he believed her politics to be," sneered Lydyg.

"Possibly." And Halwood winced.

"The girl's Tory enough now to suit any Britisher," grumbled Lydyg. "Now what will you do? Denounce him?"

Halwood smiled wryly.

"Not just yet. Never play your best card until it will take a trick. You better go back to the tavern. Moses Doane is sure to call there. Tell him to meet me at Drinker's House at eight o'clock this evening. I'll wait twenty minutes for him."

"Judas! That's the prize nest of British officers!" exclaimed Lydyg. "The officers of the Forty-second Highlanders and the Royal Irish have quarters there."

"The very place for me, a British spy in the pay of Blidgett, to visit," said Halwood.

An hour after Lydyg had departed Halwood sauntered along Front Street to the north corner of Drinker's Alley, and entered the lounging room of the tavern. That Moses Doane had passed uncomfortable moments was indicated by his prompt appearance as the clock struck eight, and by the more remarkable fact that he was sober. As he joined Halwood in a corner, the latter warned—

"Take that hunted rabbit look off your face."

Moses conjured up a strained smile and called for cheese and ale. Officers were entering and leaving. Several of those who took pains to bow to Moses had ignored his existence prior to the arrival of Nancy Doane.

"This is a poor place to talk," Moses complained huskily.

"A most excellent place. It is so public it becomes private. Anything new?"

"Merciful masters! I'm sweating blood, if that's news. Ain't you got anything to say to me?"

Halwood took mercy on him and explained:

"I'm confident I have a checkmate for you. If Blidgett does not move against you, you are to forget it. If Blidgett accuses you of anything serious you are to talk as I direct. You are to answer none of the questions he may ask. You are to add nothing to, or take away from, the talk I will furnish you. After you've made your little talk you will smile, look serene and keep your big mouth shut. We'll wait till the last of these people leave."

"They are going to the theater," mumbled Moses, his expression continuing very dubious. "I'm supposed to look in, as Nancy will be there."

"You not only will look in, but you'll remain and escort her home."

"I vow I'd give a thousand guineas if I never had brought her to town!"

"Too late for that. Listen. If Blidgett's charges against you are of a serious nature you will tell him, 'Mr. Blidgett, you ask me to explain certain things. Many other things need explanation. There is a dead man, secretly buried. He needs explaining. He was murdered—with a dagger. I have written down all the facts. If anything happens to me the paper will be delivered to Sir William Howe, and other copies will be supplied to certain prominent citizens.' "

"What a mess of rot!" growled Moses. "Just a lot of foolish words. Kinsman, I thought you was smart."

"And you are thick headed. Do as I say and you'll checkmate him. Don't forget the written accounts for Sir William and the citizenry. No matter how he crowds you with questions, don't talk. Smile. It would be fine if you could whistle carelessly."

"And that's all?" demanded Moses, in high disgust.

"It's enough, I believe. It's the big card and it will take the trick. Now repeat what I have told you to say."

Moses complied, talking laboriously, yet keeping to the letter of his instructions. Halwood shook his head and complained:

"Too much as if you were trying to remember something that some one has told you. Try again. Speak more easily, more trippingly."

FOR half an hour Moses rehearsed his few lines, and became quite glib in giving them. They separated, and Halwood proceeded to the theater and entered by the side door. He found André, who was making up for his rôle. Some of the officer-actors stared at him coldly, the two duels still rankling; but no umbrage could openly be taken against one of Major André's friends. Through the peephole in the curtain Halwood surveyed the gay and brilliant assemblage. The house was ablaze with multi-colored military trappings, beautiful gowns and jewels. Beauty held sway, and despite all the elaborate makeup of the times there were many women one needs must look at again and again.

In the Virginian's estimation none could compare with Nancy Doane, with her wistfully beautiful face. Small chance she would have of hearing the amateurs spout their lines, or follow the story of the play. Sir William, on her left, had no eyes for the stage. Others of high rank leaned forward to watch the ever changing expression of her face.

Halwood was much depressed by the open adulation of her many wooers. He left the theater and moodily returned to the tavern. Because of Nancy he had given his trump card to her lout of a brother, and there was bound to come a time within days, or hours, when he would need it most sadly. He liked Moses Doane, although knowing him to be as crooked in his way of living as he was overpowering physically. Such liking, however, was scarcely sufficient to induce the sacrifice of his own neck so that a raider and a thief might escape the Ferret. What he had done was for Nancy Doane, and he fervently hoped she never would know.

On the following day Halwood endeavored to put the girl from his thoughts. He vowed he would not think about her. In the afternoon he mustered up courage enough to present himself, unaccompanied by Moses. He sent in his name, and the stately automaton brought back word his mistress was not at home. Halwood had glimpsed her at the window as he approached the door. He met Marshall of the Long Walk near the house, and was too downcast and angry to pause and speak with him. Marshall, too, seemed to be in haste to get somewhere. Somewhat surprised by this ostracism, Halwood glanced back and saw Marshall approach the Doane house and enter.

"Well, I wasn't turned back because of caste," he bitterly told himself.

While he was at Plumstead the girl had seemed to be as honest as sunshine and as transparet as crystal. Since coming to town and being accepted as *the* belle among many beautiful women, she had become an enigma. He had assumed she was angry with him, believing he had "turned his coat" to serve King George. Despite Wayne's warning against confidantes, he doubtless would have revealed his dual life had he met her alone when she first arrived in Philadelphia. Now she was queen of the fair company curtsying low to Sir William and his staff, and seemed to have forgotten her pity for the poor Provost prisoners. Her social triumph was considered by Tories as a victory. Halwood was heartsick by the time he reached his room in the Kinney house.

This visit called for considerable resolution, and only self-preservation could prompt him to enter the place again. The ghastly tenant in the cellar was ever in his thoughts. Consequently the dead man's presence was felt in every room, in the halls and on the stairs. But there was the imperative importance of keeping in close touch with Blidgett as long as possible. Another very depressing worry was his inactivity; rather, his inability to secure any important news for the American army. There was nothing to report, aside from the endless round of merry-making. The enemy's occupancy of the town meant only another holiday for Sir William.

Parallel to this worry was the lack of Whig news to report to Blidgett. The patriot Army was denned up for the

winter, and only foraging parties left the valley. Halwood seemed destined to continue his status as an idler. The only compensation was his belief that nothing of moment could be planned, or attempted, without his receiving advance notice. If not for this conviction he would have quit the city overnight and joined the army.

Yet never had he feared the master spy as he did while softly mounting the stairs to the third floor. He knew Blidgett had not returned, and still the presence of that evil genius pervaded the mansion and was in every room.

He had seen nothing of the slave on entering. His errand was to examine the observatory and make certain beyond all doubt that he and Lydyg had left no trace of their recent visit. There were two fresh trays of food at the foot of the ladder. Halwood took one, the dishes yet warm, and ate his supper in his room. Replacing the tray, he ascended to the cupola, and in the strong light minutely examined the floor to make sure no speck of cellar dirt was visible. Satisfied on this point, he went to his room to change his clothes for a suit that fitted in with the lavish license of dress now being practised by all holders of the vanishing American currency, who were eager to spend it for clothes, a banquet, anything, before its value reached zero.

He had removed all but his underclothing when he felt a strong urge to visit the other side of the house. Blidgett was in Plumstead. He would not be back for several days. The light was excellent for detecting traps. In a thrice he was on the rafters and had crossed to the third story hallway. He listened a moment from habit, and observed a tall mirror at the foot of the stairs, and another at right angles to it.

"New trick," he mused. "Wonder how far an image in the mirror can be reflected. Cunning devil probably can sit in his ground floor room and see if any one is up here."

But Blidgett was away and there was no chance of being discovered. Halwood lowered himself to the floor and dropped lightly on his bare feet. His objective was the wardrobe room. The door was unlocked. He opened it but did not need to cross the threshold. His gaze, in questing for something that should be immediately available, halted on a box close by the door. He gingerly removed the cover and beheld the wig and beard which could quickly transform the Ferret into his murdered victim. The hellish unrestraint of the man in seeking his ends, even more than his wizardry in succeeding, almost overwhelmed Halwood's nerve.

He replaced the disguise and swept a wall curtain of muslin aside and beheld a coffin shaped box on the floor, and against the wall. Inwardly fearing what he might behold, he tested the lid and found it loose. Opening it, he received one of the great surprises of his life. The receptacle was filled with hard money, nearly all of which was in gold. A fortune had been left there, unguarded, as if it were so much worthless hardware. As it was enemy gold Halwood took a big, gaily colored handkerchief from the shelf and improvised a bag, and filled it with guineas. Then he returned to his room, completed his dressing, distributed the gold pieces through his various pockets, and left the mansion without seeing any signs of the African.

He made direct to the tavern, and found the long room was filling up with officers, many of whom would be drinking and gambling until late at night. André accosted him, saying—

"How did you like our little offering last night?"

"Marvelous! Vastly superior to any professional presentation. There was intelligence back of your work."

The major was pleased. He modestly admitted:

"I fancied we did it rather well. And the waterfall?"

"I could hear it dashing and splashing over the rocks."

"Oddly put, I vow! No rocks showed at all, you know."

"Therein is the art," said Halwood promptly. "The rushing water was so vigorous and lifelike one could take the rocks on trust. Just as you take the framework of my body on trust, although it's covered with flesh."

"That's mighty generous of you, Halwood. But no one has to take our Mr. Blidgett's bones on trust. He wears them on the outside. Ha-ha! Nonsense aside, I enjoy it all. Of course, I am a soldier first, and a dabster last—and I'd welcome a sharp bit of soldiering. When I first came to town old Kinney read my stars. Y'know, he found something so bad he wouldn't tell it. By Jove! Think of that! He acted as if he felt sorry enough to pity me. Said I was so young, and all that gammon. No point in my mentioning. Queer I even should remember it."

"We never forget anything, although, sometimes, we fail to remember," said Halwood pedantically.

"Eh? Rattle me! If that isn't clever! By the way, I saw Blidgett on the street just before coming here. What do you think? He was anxious to find our fantastic, lawless yokel, who is the brother of the most charming and the handsomest woman in all Philadelphia. I trust our Mr. Blidgett isn't smitten with her charms. Imagine that for a theme of a play! Modernize the Satyr! Clap a castor hat on him. Drape his ungainly frame with taste and great expense, and have him make love to the fairest of women, with his cloven hoofs in top boots. Damme! It could be tragedy, or a roaring farce."

"Praxiteles' creation was a handsome fellow as compared with Mr. Blidgett," lightly added Halwood.

Shortly thereafter he was in the street, greatly worried. Blidgett's return, like many of his appearances, was entirely unexpected. He was not one to quit a trail until he had bagged the game. His early return to town betokened success, and spelled disaster to Moses Doane, unless the latter remembered his unique defense and doggedly stuck to it, adding nothing, omitting nothing . . .

BLIDGETT removed his hat as he stood in front of the tavern. Several men, appearing to be of various social grades, from gentleman to wharf rat, worked in closer, as if about to enter the tavern. Blidgett ordered:

"Moses Doane. In some drinking den. Find him. Report to me here."

The fellow in tatters, suggesting the scavenger tribe, was the first to return. With his back to his master he said—

"The Crooked Billet."

"Good. You are prompt. Follow me with the others."

With that, Blidgett sauntered along the streets and entered the Billet.

Moses was in a corner, eating coarse rye bread and cheese, washed down by copious draughts of stout ale from a brown jug. Blidgett startled him by suddenly slipping into the opposite chair. For a moment Moses was nonplused. The evil genuis was back ahead of time. Inwardly Moses was thankful it was ale and not brandy he had been engulfing. He looked and acted stupid. After the first shock of discovery his mind cleared and his dark eyes began to smolder. After all, it would be a simple task to break the weird creature's back.

"Back again?" he grunted.

The ghastly grin remained immovable. Blidgett refrained from speaking, expecting Moses to display uneasiness and betray himself. Such sufferings of a victim were one of the master spy's perquisites. Moses swallowed another bumper of ale, and invited—

"Wash the dust out your throat?"

He was raising a hand to summon a waiter and secure another glass, when Blidgett dissuaded him by emphatically shaking his bony head. Still silent, he rested his sharp elbows on the table and cradled his gaunt chin in his hands and stared steadily at Moses.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" demanded Moses. "Cat got your tongue?" He was inwardly quailing.

"Doane," whispered Blidgett, "I have

something to tell you. This is no place for it."

"Say it here, or be damned. This bread and ale beats all the fancy eating in the town."

"You have been robbing our King," Blidgett accused.

"Damn lie!" blustered Moses. "Stop that kind of talk."

"And don't you lie to me," warned Blidgett. "I've been to the edge of Chester County. I surprised your friend, FitzPatrick. He escaped, but he did not have time to destroy, or carry off the accounts. Doane, you've stolen nearly six thousand pounds from his Majesty."

Moses lowered sullenly, but made no reply. Blidgett whipped from a pocket a written statement of what he had discovered. He shoved the paper across the board for Moses to examine. Moses gaped at it in silence.

"In the face of this evidence, you miserable thief, you dare not deny!" said Blidgett, his deepset eyes glowing yellowishly.

Moses' big jaws finished masticating a chunk of bread. Then he clamped them together and glared at the official report. His skin felt prickly as he noticed the few lines of writing resembled tiny skeletons, some dancing, some prone.

"You dare not deny!" whispered Blidgett.

"No. I don't deny it. I figured the game was good for twenty thousand," was the frank reply.

Blidgett leaned back and gently bowed his head. His voice was scarcely audible as he pocketed his report, and said:

"It will be handled so that no beautiful sister will know anything about it. Where confession is made in certain cases I use my own discretion, and do not annoy our commander-in-chief."

"Are you planning mischief for me?" demanded Moses.

Blidgett raised a hand. Four men came from the doorway and took their positions, two on each side of the Bucks County irregular.

Moses, wits quickened a bit.

"I have something to tell you, Blidgett, that you won't want these men to hear," he began.

"Be brief. Very brief. They are my slaves. They will hear nothing, repeat nothing."

"Very well. It's on your own head, my friend. I've written an account of what I have discovered. It's much longer than your report on my case. But I can tell it quickly. It has nothing to do with profits in sharp trading. But sealed copies of it are in reliable hands. If I should disappear, or suddenly be taken sick and die, those copies will be delivered to Sir William and three of the town's leading citizens, including Mr. Shippen."

"You are fighting to kill time. It does you no good," said Blidgett. He nodded his head and strong hands were clamped on Doane's shoulders.

The prisoner made no move to resent this hampering of his liberty. In a low voice he began:

"He was an old man. He was a Whig—"

By an almost imperceptible gesture Blidgett ordered the four men to fall back. Moses grinned triumphantly and, with more confidence, continued:

"Many things need to be explained besides my deal in Chester County certificates. That old man. Murdered by a dagger. Secretly buried . . . He needs much explaining."

Several dots of perspiration stood out on the tightly drawn skin of the bony face. Moses could not know it, but he was the first man to count such a tremendous coup on the Ferret. In a husky voice he said:

"Speak low and explain it. You explain it."

Moses shook his head, smiled cunningly and replied:

"I haven't killed and secretly buried any aged man. I haven't any such dead man to explain. I've dickered in Chester County certificates. I bought 'em far below their face value. Of course I had to take my profits. I'll go with you to head-

quarters, and both of us will explain."

"Doane, when were you in my house—the Kinney house?"

Moses almost betrayed surprise. Then he was recalling his instructions. He would answer no questions. He would say nothing beyond what Halwood had told him. As a fact, he could add nothing to it. He shook his massive head stubbornly, came to his feet briskly and announced:

"I'm ready. See that I'm not run over and killed in the streets. In that case the papers would be delivered tonight."

The four men came forward, eyeing their chief and waiting for their orders. He motioned for them to depart and, without a word, or a look, at Doane, he followed them.

Moses rubbed his head violently and muttered:

"Damme! And that's what's called checkmate! That kinsman of mine is damnably clever . . . But I'd give twenty guineas to know what it's all about!"

CHAPTER XV

STOLEN AWAY

MILITARY news for the patriot Army was scarce, owing to Sir William's disinclination to bestir himself, plus his great love for merry-making. Yet life, almost insensibly at first, quickened for Halwood and Lydyg until both sensed the tightening of the invisible coils. The tavern waiter was the first to discover their mutual peril. Halwood was skeptical, but then grew convinced. Surface indications showed nothing alarming, yet the Virginian felt as if he were being watched. He fully satisfied himself that this suspected espionage was not imagination when he discovered that wherever he went, there was always a man ahead, and one loitering behind him.

These individuals, and they seemed to be numerous, were representative of various town types under the Howe régime. The trailer behind might be a beggar in filthy rags, an invalid soldier, a smart subaltern, or a frowsy woman of the street. Similarly, the one ahead might be cast in any one of various rôles.

Nervous watchfulness developed in Halwood an uncanny shrewdness of observation. With the streets thronged with types from the town's many strata, he soon could pick out unerringly the man, woman, or gamin, who was keeping him under surveillance.

He was alarmed when he discovered his peril. He had parted with his best defense when he aided Moses Doane to escape Blidgett's net. Now he had nothing to trade. This spying upon all his movements began a few days after Moses played his trump card. But it was Lydyg who put him on his guard. The cleverest thief was placing bacon and eggs on the table when he imparted the dire news from the corner of his mouth.

"Game's up, governor," he mumbled. "They've clamped a close watch on us. Can't take a drink of beer without a colonel or a beggar standing at my elbow. One of their men is helper to our pastry cook."

From that moment Halwood had eyes in the back of his head. He quickly discovered the system of the pair dogging his every step.

Then the body of Red Schles was found in the river. There was no indication of violence except a slight contusion on the head. Along the waterfront it was believed the man's death was accidental, that he had fallen from wharf or boat, that the blow on the head was the result of his fall rather than the cause. But the two hunted men knew Blidgett would be quick to read the "accident" differently. The man's death was too closely linked to other miscarriages of the Ferret's plans to be fortuitous. The master spy had smarted under a sequence of minor hindrances and the sum total had aroused him to a realization that herrings continually were being dragged across what had promised to be important trails.

Schles had boasted and promised to re-

turn with information which would "cook the goose" of a certain "uppity" person. Blidgett had cursed him black for delaying his arrival. But the man had kept faith. He had come to town. Never would he have returned unless ready to make good his boast. On the eve of making a presumably important report he had "fallen" into the river. Blidgett always had played the game his own way. It was unthinkable that he should be balked in an overgrown town, held by his Majesty's army. The master spy's conceit and pride were great; but towering above all personal ambitions was his loyalty to the King. His Majesty must not suffer even minor setbacks. No one in Philadelphia had more deeply taken to heart the surrender of Burgoyne than had the head of the secret intelligence bureau. The evidence of this hostile opposition was accumulative. Schles' death was coupled too closely to the successful and astounding defiance of heavy witted Moses Doane to be accepted as an accident.

Blidgett's first move was direct, and not disguised in cunning. Nancy Doane and her brother returned from the theater, and the former, after one glance at her dressing room, came forth to announce:

"My room has been ransacked, Moses! Turned inside out! Yet I can't see that anything has been taken."

She summoned the butler, one of Blidgett's agents, and demanded an explanation. The man was very suave, and he insisted the intrusion must have taken place during his time off. The others of the staff solemnly vowed they had been drinking ale with the cook, or strolling the streets and looking into shop windows. The cook swore that he and his helper had not left the kitchen during the afternoon. After a brief cross-examination of her servants, each and every one on Blidgett's payroll, Moses nervously suggested they investigate the condition of the other rooms.

Unattended by any of the servants, brother and sister made an inspection. Every closet, drawer, and possible hiding place, had been overhauled. No attempt had been made to conceal the visitation.

"Thieves from the street, and in a hurry," dubiously decided Nancy.

"But do you miss anything?" asked Moses. "You said nothing's taken from your dressing room." His broad face betrayed mental distress.

"Why, no. It's very queer! They left my guineas and my jewels. What queer thieves!"

Moses tiptoed to the hall door and made sure there were no eavesdroppers. Standing where he could watch the hall and the head of the stairs, he rapidly related his recent experience with Blidgett. He concluded by whispering:

"Cousin Halwood saved my pelt, Nance. God knows what the rubbish he told me to talk meant. But it took the wind out the sails of that bony devil."

"And it sent him, or his tools, here in search of the paper. And there *is* no paper," she murmured.

"Strike me deaf and blind!" mumbled Moses, as he wiped the nervous perspiration from his face. "I've saved my pelt from one danger, but I've opened this house and you to other dangers! But I'd swung as high as Haman, Nance, if I couldn't 'a' wriggled out of the Ferret's trap."

Stark horror was in her eyes as she listened and understood what had been happening offstage. Pulling her brother's head down so she could whisper in his ear, she asked:

"But how could Halwood know a man had been murdered? He turned his coat, but why should he keep silent about a murder?"

"Who's been murdered? Must be all bosh!" puzzled Moses.

"Not with Blidgett being afraid it will be discovered," she reminded. "Oh, he is a horrible creature! I do not understand why Sir William has him near him! He's not human. He's a ghoul. Moses, I want to go back to Plumstead."

Moses was much concerned. Nor did the town have the old drawing power

now that he feared his dishonest profits were ended. The girl hurriedly went on:

"This dead man, whoever he is! Halwood as much as says Blidgett murdered him—with a dagger. Then he had knowledge of it. He works hand and glove with the monster. He has guilty knowledge—or worse."

"Damned neighborly of him to give me the tip, when I was feeling the hangman rolling back my collar," insisted Moses. "As for going back home, I'm agreeable. I've taken good profits. I always tell the boys never to stick to a game till you lose your winnings!"

Nancy was sick at heart and motioned for him to go; but she did not repeat her desire to return home.

HALWOOD, now conscious of spying eyes, found it more and more difficult to communicate with Lydyg without betraying their partnership. He managed to convey this much while giving his breakfast order. At the nearest table was a captain of a Hessian regiment, trying to eat with one hand, the other being in a sling. He was new to the tavern, and yet, ostensibly, he had been in the army a sufficient length of time to be wounded; and the only fighting was at Red Bank. As this man turned to observe a group entering from the taproom, Lydyg inclined his head and rapidly whispered:

"Write down what we'll do. Loose brick in fireplace of your old room. I'll get it after dark."

Halwood bowed his head, although he disliked the risk of committing anything to writing. He knew his visit to the room must be made openly, and that there must be some apparent purpose. If he removed some, or all of his clothing, it might cause a watcher to believe he was ceasing to use the room. He felt the storm was about to break, when no artifice would save him. This conclusion forced him to consider immediate flight. Finishing his breakfast, he went to the room and, taking writing material, wrote rapidly. Sanding the paper, he found and removed the brick and deposited his brief instructions. Then he packed and strapped a bundle of clothing and departed. Outside he observed a mendicant with a tray, and he called him to carry the bundle. As the man turned and approached Halwood recognized him as the vender of cheap rings, the American spy.

"Walk behind me with this bundle," said Halwood. "Then take word to General Wayne I'm trying to escape from town at once. Also that I am trying to send some gold."

The man pocketed his cheap wares, slung his tray over his back and accepted the package of clothing. Halwood made for the Kinney house. As he paid the man at the door the captain of the Hessians, one arm in a sling, walked by.

Now he knew in earnest how it felt to be hunted, with the pack within baying distance. He hurried to the third floor and left his clothing. Returning to the ground floor, he called the African by name; but Nero had succumbed to his fears after learning that his *juju* charms were of no avail, and had fled the house. The ashes in the fireplace were cold, indicating an absence of at least twenty-four hours. Half expecting the sinister Mr. Blidgett to appear at any moment, the Virginian proceeded with his business.

His first move was to secure two stout bags, originally used as containers for charcoal. He carried these to the top floor and to his room. Pausing only to secure a pistol, he drew himself up on the rafters and quickly crossed to the other side of the house. He spent but a moment in listening ,then dropped the bags and lowered himself to the floor. Opening the wardrobe door, he opened the coffin shaped receptacle and transferred the gold to a bag, and drew the other over it for additional protection.

The return to his room was as quickly made. He washed all stains from his hands and changed his clothes, and then carried the treasure downstairs and to the back of the house, and deposited it beside the rear door. He left that entrance unfastened. Although he was hoping he

was quitting the mansion for the last time, he carried with him the key to the front door.

Until late afternoon he idled away the time in shops. When it was time for him to return to the tavern he saw a man in ragged clothes ahead of him. He knew a second trailer was behind him. Near the entrance to the tavern the ragged man turned away briskly, as if his job were finished. There was to be the weekly assembly ball at the tavern that night, and workmen were busy arranging decorations. Halwood went to the bar and called for ale, and in a mirror watched the door. A fat citizen, wearing a broad Quaker hat, entered and ordered a glass of rum. Swallowing his drink, the man departed, and Halwood knew his next brace of trailers would be entirely different.

Suddenly Halwood succumbed to a nervous apprehension and for a bit pictured himself in the Chestnut Street prison, another victim for Cunningham to persecute. Shaking off the fear, he gave his attention to the wheel, and gambled with indifferent success. Lydyg briskly entered the dining room and fell to work at polishing the tables. Halwood openly approached him and gave orders for a dinner for six, and briefly discussed a choice of menus.

"I understand thoroughly, sir," said Lydyg. Under his breath he whispered, "Gawd! I hate most mortal to enter that place." Then, aloud, "Everything shall be done to your liking, sir. Thank you, sir."

As the hand accepted the coin Halwood felt a piece of paper pressed into his palm. Lydyg returned to the kitchen and at the door cast a backward glance, which meant goodby.

Halwood surreptitiously examined the paper and found it purported to be a pass for all outposts and for entering all places in the city. It was signed with Blidgett's name. The Virginian marveled at the cunning, which permitted such exactness in imitating the most peculiar handwriting he ever had seen. Accompanying it was a scrap of paper on which was scrawled, "Hope you pull through. I'll be at your heels."

The Virginian's next move was open and deliberate. He went to the stable, and left the door open as he proceeded to saddle the mare. A lounger, appearing from nowhere, but with more than a lounger's curiosity in his sharp eyes, came to the doorway, and asked—

"Where you going?"

Halwood, now in the saddle, replied:

"None of your business! Out of the way, you damn fool! Want to be run down!"

The mare leaped forward, and the man barely escaped being bowled over. From lack of exercise the beautiful creature was unusually fettlesome. It was with difficulty that the rider could hold her down to a mincing, dancing gait as he rode toward the outskirts of the town. As he was striking into the open country the thunder of hoofs caused him to look back. A squadron of horse was bearing down on him at a mad gallop. The mare reared and all but fell over backward in her frantic desire to race the upstarts. Halwood pivoted her about, and as her front feet touched the ground Captain Long, his dark face flushed with triumph, was blocking the way and triumphantly demanding—

"Where you think you're going, my dashing fellow?"

"If it's any of your business, I'm exercising my mount, and I want no lead sent after me this time. What the devil do you mean by chasing after me like this? The last occasion of our coming together should have been enough for you."

"So?" snarled Long. "Suppose, my popinjay, you condescend to cast your eyes on this bit of writing." And he roughly thrust a paper under Halwood's nose.

With the mare dancing and quivering, Halwood managed to read the paper. It was an order, and it read:

> The bearer of this order is authorized to arrest one Enos Halwood, in event he attempts

to leave the city of Philadelphia. By command of BLIDGETT, of the intelligence bureau.

Inwardly quaking, Halwood managed to smile disdainfully as he handed back the paper, and remarked—

"That's dated three days ago."

"Turn around, sir. You are under arrest," said Long.

"Not to spare you trouble, which you seem to be hungry for, but purely because this little lady will feel very sad if she doesn't get her exercise, I'll ask you to read a paper of mine. It is dated ten o'clock of the morning of this day."

As he spoke Halwood fished out the forged Blidgett order, written by Lydyg, with the date now filled in.

Captain Long, stupefied, glared at the eccentric writing, with its suggestion of tiny ink skeletons. He compared the two orders critically, pocketed his and handed back the other. He mopped his brow nervously, and in a voice which trembled with surprise and anger he exclaimed—

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"God is omnipotent. You may be—Will you kindly get out of my way!"

Speechless with rage, doubly so because he believed Blidgett had neglected to recall the arrest order, Long yanked his horse about and rode sullenly into the town. Like an arrow the mare went skimming over the wintry road, making for Valley Forge. Twice, at outposts, she was reined in, but Blidgett's pass was honored without question.

FARMERS were bringing much produce and live stock into the city. The cleverest thief, feeling very lonely now that he knew the Virginian had departed, wandered to the market to negotiate important, and dangerous, business. He was surprised when his sharp gaze failed to spot any spies at his heels. For several hours after Halwood's departure he had had a nervous chill. Every bit of street commotion became the arrest of his friend and champion. With his heart in his mouth he repeatedly had forced himself to gaze from the tavern windows. By late afternoon he was sure Halwood had escaped, or had been secretly arrested. In any event, the Virginian's last request must be carried out. He opened conversation with a farmer, after learning that the man lived on the road leading toward the winter camp of the American army. Drawing the man aside, he asked—

"Do you like gold money?"

"Only a fool could have a doubt about it."

"If a man called at your place with gold, how many beeves could you sell him?"

"Thirty prime steers." Then, taking alarm, he hastily added, "Not mine, you understand. I'd have to raise 'em among my neighbors."

"I am a speculator," explained Lydyg. "I take my profit where I can find it the fattest. I can raise the gold for your beeves. Tell me where you live, and have your stock ready to deliver, and enough boys and men to drive the herd, and I'll pay you English prices."

"Fine talk," mumbled the farmer suspiciously. "Yaller money talks. Not fine words."

"There's a guinea in your coat pocket. It wasn't there until I came up. Here is its mate. Do two guineas talk loud enough?"

The farmer clapped a hand on his pocket, felt something hard, and proceeded to explore the interior. He slyly drew forth the gold piece and another dropped into his palm.

"They talk loud enough to be heard from here to Valley Forge," he whispered. Then, suspiciously, "You thinkin' to come down on me with a parcel of men?"

"I'll come alone. Have your stock hidden in the woods, anywhere. Hang a lantern outside your door. I may come late."

"And you mayn't come at all."

"Then you are two guineas ahead."

"I'll have a lantern burning in my open barn door. Six miles out, right hand side. Just before you come to my place you'll

ride by the ruins of a house that was burned. When you coming?"

"Tonight, or never. I'd like to buy, or hire, a cart and horse to travel in."

"You git a bit queer now," said the farmer. "You have gold. You can ride a horse. We country folks ain't looking for any trouble."

"You have a right to sell me a cart and horse—here in Philadelphia. How could that make you trouble? I saw you take some bread and sausage from that cart under the shed. It's yours?"

The man nodded.

"Have it there, horse harnessed, an hour after nightfall. I'll come for it and give you two more guineas. When we reach your place and I've paid for the cattle and finished the drive, I'll hand the rig back to you. That will make four fat guineas besides what I pay for the stock."

"Well, I dunno. Sounds too good to be true. It's mighty little hard money we folks see, and both sides carry off our stock."

"Very well. If you don't know I must find a man who does. You are two guineas the richer for having met me."

Lydyg turned as if to depart, but the farmer seized his arm and hoarsely whispered:

"I'll do it if I swing for it! We're starving for want of hard money! Before spring the country will be swept clean of everything eatable. I must have a right to sell to you, or any one else in this town."

With this bargain struck, and the daylight fading, Lydyg vanished in the shadows and found a hiding place in a cattle shed. After awhile two men passed, and one of them was saying:

"I tell ye, he never come away from this place. Our orders was to keep outside 'n' pick him up when he come clear of the market. All that fussy bother so's not to scare the farmers out of coming to town."

"Tell all that to Blidgett," grumbled the second man. "He isn't here. Then he's gone somewhere. We'd better go back and try the City Tavern."

The streets were but dimly lighted at best, once one got away from the shopping district. Here and there a Tory mansion was brightly illuminated, and lighted patches of the street opposite the windows. Lydyg remained in hiding until those with the price of a supper were eating the evening meal; then he appropriated the cart and horse and, sitting on a truss of hay, drove from the market and without any interruption turned the corner of High Street. He hitched the horse under a tree at the rear of the Kinney mansion.

His horror of the house was profound. He fancied he saw a bearded face peering from the cellar window, the eyes luminous with an awful light. Wishing to have the business over with, he ran to the rear door, opened it gently and reached in and groped until his hand located the heavy bag. From somewhere in the house a sibilant voice cried out:

"I see you hiding out there! Come in here!"

Bending low, and moving at a staggering run, Lydyg gained his cart. He heard three sharp blasts from a whistle. He saw a lighted candle pass before a window on Blidgett's side of the house. Blidgett had sounded the alarm, but it was obvious he suspected no intruder to be in the kitchen as no light appeared there.

With the gold covered by ragged blankets, and with an old buffalo robe about his shoulders, the cleverest thief drove slowly along. The wheels of the clumsy vehicle sadly needed greasing, and uttered squeaking protests at every turn. About a mile from town he heard hoofs pounding behind him and glanced back to discern a dark mass in swift motion. Drawing a frowzy blanket up over his head, he pulled out one side to give the horsemen room. The riders slowed down long enough to ask if any one had passed him.

"Not a soul," truthfully replied Lydyg. "Who be you looking for?"

Ignoring him and his query the leader

shouted an order and rode across a field to another road, his men racing after him.

It was near midnight when Lydyg made out the ruins of the burned homestead. The horse quickened his pace of its own accord. Without guidance, or urging, it jogged along to a low farmhouse and turned into the yard, and made for the barn. Several shadowy figures came forward. A voice nervously demanded—

"Who comes here at this hour?"

"A man with guineas," answered Lydyg.

One shadow detached itself from the group and advanced to the cart, and called out:

"It's all right, boys." Then to Lydyg, "We've got a prime herd together. Settle the business and we'll be starting. Or will you come in and git warm first?"

"Get your cattle in the road, so I can count them and pay you half the price, t'other half to be handed over when we come within hailing distance of the first outpost."

"Valley Forge!" whispered the man.

"Yes. Does it turn your stomach?"

"God knows I'll be glad for them poor critters to git something to eat. But we can't sell for paper rubbish."

"You're selling for gold," said Lydyg. "But let's be forward. We don't want to be picked up by British raiders."

In such a fashion did Lydyg return to the army, where Halwood had saved him from "fifty of the cat, well laid on." As he approached, half starved men heard the welcome sound of cattle. An officer of the watch appeared, and Lydyg briefly explained and requested that the gold be taken to the hut of some general officer.

"You're the man Captain Halwood said would come," said the officer. He held up the lantern and stared into the face of the cleverest thief. Then he was softly exclaiming, "Wonder of the ages! That fellow back again, and bringing *gold!*"

CHAPTER XVI

THE END OF THE ROAD

SNOW and blow and Arctic cold characterized that winter at Valley Forge. Men died of starvation, as well as sickness. Not far away, in Philadelphia, there was endless gaiety.

Halwood nursed some jealousy of the unknown spy, but was compelled to admire his ability to uncover official secrets and to transmit the same to the American camp. It did amaze him to learn from General Wayne that headquarters had known as early as the preceding October that General Howe had requested to be recalled, and had suggested Sir Henry Clinton as his successor. There were long periods when no information was received. Once, word came through that firewood was very scarce and commanding a high price, and that a vender of such might pick up some odds and ends of information. The suggestion was not acted upon as the American army desired only definite news of major importance. From his talk with Wayne, the Virginian was convinced that none at headquarters knew more about the identity of the anonymous informant than he did. This helped his pride somewhat.

With the sun climbing higher and the frozen snow and ice vanishing, the spirit of the army greatly improved. Foragers ranged more widely and enjoyed more bickerings, and brought in more supplies. Lydyg, now a sergeant, developed an uncanny knack in locating caches of provisions and liquors. Halwood, much to his annoyance, was kept in camp. Spring found him a major, and impatient for service. Throughout the white months he had heard no word concerning the Doanes, except as stray copies of city newspapers contained glowing praise of Nancy Doane's beauty. One item expressed the pleasure resulting from her "return". From this he deduced she had spent part of the winter at Plumstead. He often wondered what new tricks his arch enemy, Blidgett, was up to.

One warm April day Wayne came from a council, his eyes shining. He was fond of Halwood, and he paused to talk a bit on meeting him.

"Our famous unknown spy is back at work, Major," he greeted. "I'm free to tell you that General Howe has recently received a letter from Lord George Germaine, stating that the King has granted his request. He will be allowed to resign, and General Clinton succeeds him. Plans are being made for a great fête, to be given in the honor of Sir William. Our commander believes the time is ripe for you to pick up some news near the city."

"In the city," Halwood corrected.

"You will not be ordered to enter the city. We realize it would be very dangerous for you to do that. The reason why you have been kept close in camp this winter was to prevent your capture, which would mean death. But with a strong scout band you might learn something of value."

Halwood slowly shook his head and insisted:

"The enemy will do nothing until the weather grows warmer. Then all they will do is to evacuate the city. Sir Henry Clinton has no desire to remain there, accomplishing nothing. I might secure some information by visiting Plumstead. The Doanes hunt with the hounds and run with the hares. They are distantly related to me. Moses Doane is indebted to me for saving his neck. He is in the city much, and he is often seen at headquarters. His sister, you will recall, was the outstanding belle of the fall and winter. I assume she maintains that prestige. I would wish to be put on my own initiative and to take but one man with me—Sergeant Lydyg."

"Think of it!" softly exclaimed Wayne. "And he was the cleverest thief until you saved him from the cat. Now he is one of our most successful raiders. I assume it can be easily arranged for him to go with you."

When Lydyg was notified of the venture he went raiding, and soon returned with an excellent horse. He philosophically remarked—

"This time we'll probably swing."

Traveling largely by night, and moving in a wide half circle, the two spies rode for Bucks County. Lydyg had learned every back road and lane, and he found his way in the darkness almost as rapidly as he did at high noon. It was he who selected the hiding place, an abandoned barn in a thick growth, and within a quarter of a mile of the Big House.

"How did you know about this place?" questioned Halwood, after they had cared for their mounts and were making a supper on coarse rye bread and cheese.

"When I rounded up a bunch of horses that Moses had hidden hereabouts. Must have made him mighty mad to lose 'em."

"Does he know you took them?" The information was disquieting to Halwood.

"Not unless some fortune-teller told him." Lydyg grinned broadly. "They just vanished. It was snowing and he couldn't find any trail. General Wayne's big sorrel came out of that haul."

After a few hours sleep Halwood left his companion and scouted the Big House. At the last bit of cover he halted to make sure none of the enemy were there. No smoke was issuing from the broad chimneys and the place seemed to be deserted. He rapped on the kitchen door as a matter of form, and discovered it was unlocked. The Doanes had realized the impossibility of keeping intruders out, and the advisability of preventing damage by permitting easy access. The room suggested a hasty departure of the owner. A pan of dishes remained unwashed. In the adjoining living rooms were evidences of a hurried packing. Expensive gowns were thrown over chairs to be left, as were various articles of male attire, which were scattered from the front hall to the butler's pantry. Halwood knew that only Moses could leave a trail like that. The two spies agreed that the girl and, at the least, one of her brothers, were disturbed while eating breakfast by the

arrival of an express. Then had followed the hasty selection of clothing and the ride to town.

Confirmation of this theory was proven when Lydyg found a copy of the *Evening Post* of recent date. It gave extensive notice of the brilliant fête to be given in honor of Sir William, prior to his departure for England. A more accurate clue was the fragment of the paper found among the breakfast dishes, a notice of a grand masque that was to precede the fête. The item spoke in florid terms of the "Bucks County beauty", and declared the masque would not be a complete success unless she returned to town from her "ancestral acres".

Halwood was depressed by this apparent love of frivolity. Lydyg read the newspaper account with a different line of thought.

"The paper says the Hessians will keep the street clear of the curious."

The Virginian frowned.

"I wouldn't turn my head to see such foolishness," said he.

"The paper says that all citizens in costume should bring their passes to save 'em the annoyance of unmasking and revealing their identity at the door," Lydyg continued.

"The fools and worse! To make merry in times like these!"

The cleverest thief grinned.

"But what a rare chance for us, from behind masks, to see some of our old friends," he murmured.

Halwood came sharply to attention.

"Eh? But that's an idea! I can't ever feel that the war is ended until I've had a final meeting with the Ferret. But there are the passes—rather, there are no passes."

"Your pass from the intelligence bureau isn't any good?"

"No. Not even if I weren't suspected. Howe is no longer commander-in-chief. Forgery is a hanging crime; but I do wish we had a sample of Sir Henry Clinton's writing . . .

"A moment—there is the guest book. Let's have a bit of a look."

HALWOOD soon found it, but it contained no signature of the new generalissimo. Lydyg assailed a big table with deep drawers. It was covered with gambling impedimenta, pipes, a sheath knife and broken pistol, and various other oddments which brought Moses Doane to mind. In one drawer was a thick packet of letters and papers having to do with forage for the enemy's horses. Among these was a complaint of the quality of hay the Doane brothers had been furnishing, and a demand that a better grade be supplied without loss of time. It was countersigned by Sir Henry Clinton.

Lydyg pounced on it eagerly and for five minutes studied it with concentrated attention. Then he seized writing material and covered several sheets, which he tore into bits and tossed in the fireplace. Then a pleased, amused expression spread over his thin, alert face and, with what appeared to be carelessness, he wrote rapidly, sanded the sheet, and handed it to Halwood along with the letter.

Halwood found it was an order for all posts and guards to pass "George Doane" without question. He marveled at the genuine appearance of the signature. It was dated May sixteenth, and the grand masque would be on the following night.

"It's as good as though written by old Clinton himself," said Halwood.

Lydyg's smile deepened as he proceeded to write one for himself under the name of "Jacob Prince".

Next came the matter of costumes. Halwood recalled the resources of the big garret. Leaving Lydyg to stand watch, he ran to the top floor, and soon returned with fringed hunting shirts, trousers, moccasins and fur hats. The latter consisted of the entire skin of the creature, in each instance a wildcat. It was the dress of the "Long Rifles of the Virginia Fire", and the common attire of those engaged in border warfare with the Indians. Lydyg found scissors and sewing material, while Halwood selected two Deckard rifles with powder horns and flints, and found a handful of the tiny bullets

which were so deadly when fired from such a precise weapon.

Retiring to the barn, the necessary alterations were made, the garments being large enough to permit their being worn over the spies' uniforms. The masquerade was nearly forty-eight hours ahead, and during the interim the adventurers kept close to the barn. On the morning of the second day they went to the Big House to forage for meat. They found a smoked ham and some bacon. It was then that Halwood produced a large key and said:

"We may decide to find quarters in the Kinney house. I've always believed I should return there sometime; the reason I've kept this."

"Not for all the King's gold!" firmly announced Lydyg.

"Would you hold back, if you knew you could catch Blidgett alone in that house?"

"I should feel he had caught *me* alone. But I'll go anywhere you go, Major—even if it's plumb to hell."

"I trust I shan't lead you to any such a disagreeable place," said Halwood. "Now, let's see. The Bell mansion is two doors from the Doane house, and on the same side—" He broke off abruptly and dodged to one side. And, bending low, he made for the rear door, softly warning:

"Danger! After me! Run!"

He stepped aside and waited till Lydyg came out, and then took time to close the door. By now the pounding of hoofs sounded close. The two raced to the growth, the mansion shielding them from discovery, and gained the path which led to the old barn. Under cover they halted and spied on the enemy. They heard a hoarse voice shouting:

"Some one was in here! I saw him through the window. Sergeant, take four men and search this place from cellar to roof."

A man ran around the house and tried the back door, calling out. The sergeant and his men were quick to enter. A troop of Light Horse rounded the corner and circled the mansion. Halwood and Lydyg separated with the path between them.

The captain of the troop displayed keen interest in the growth. Suddenly he spurred his horse forward and penetrated the cover until he came to the path. He maneuvered as if thoroughly acquainted with the locale. He held his head low to escape drooping branches, and darted glances from side to side, his long pistol cocked. It was obvious to Halwood that the man had seen something to arouse his suspicion. As he slowly advanced Halwood discovered he was Captain Long.

Several troopers came pounding after him. Long reined in and motioned for them to go back. As a frequent visitor to the Doane home he was familiar with much of the surrounding country. Suddenly he stood in the stirrups and brought down the heavy pistol and fired, not at Halwood, who was nearby, but at a right angle to him.

Like a thin echo came the spiteful crack of a rifle; and Long, of the Light Horse, slowly settled in the saddle and sagged over the pommel. The horse turned and trotted back to the house, his dead master swaying slightly. Halwood heard the pounding of hoofs as the troopers rode to investigate the shooting. As wild cries of rage testified to the meeting of the men and their dead leader, the Virginian ran at top speed for the barn.

Lydyg had both horses saddled and ready for instant flight. Halwood leaped into the saddle and rode north. After a quarter of a mile had been covered, with no signs of being pursued, Lydyg slid from his horse and tossed the reins to Halwood. He stole through the timber toward the house. Fifteen minutes passed, and Halwood was about to search for his companion when he heard a stick break behind him. He wheeled the mare about, bent low and was about to ride headlong against any enemy, when a low bird call permitted him to relax and wipe the sweat from his face. Lydyg, smiling his twisted smile, appeared and reported—

"Whole kit and kaboodle of them are off for town, packing their leader on his horse."

"Why did you cut in?" remonstrated Halwood. "There was a grudge between us. It was for me to fight him."

"Aye. But he happened to sight me. He was trying to shoot me," explained Lydyg. "Besides, you only had one shot. I had my pistol and the rifle. So I tossed him a lead pill he couldn't swallow."

The tragic incident compelled an immediate change of base. The spies' choice was some old growth, much nearer the city, but half a mile from the highway. This new camp was used until dusk of the following day. Could either spy have secured a sufficiently lofty coign of vantage he would have witnessed a rare riding back and forth in Plumstead, with Moses Doane on a big black stallion the most active in seeking traces of Captain Long's slayer.

Shadows were thickening when the two men rode through the timber, utilizing its cover to the last rod. It was early evening when they took a byroad and made for the city. It was black night when Lydyg led the way down a narrow lane, the opening of which Halwood had not discerned.

"Horse hovel in here," explained Lydyg. "We can change to our Long Rifle dress and be in High Street inside of twenty minutes."

Halwood had to trust his companion's judgment implicitly as his winter riding had been too restricted to permit of any knowledge of that particular section. From Lydyg's description he formed a mental map of the locale, and he was tutored until he was convinced he could find the place again in the event they became separated.

DISGUISED and masked, they hurried through the outlying streets, and entered High. It was not until they had mingled with a crowd of masked revelers that Halwood made a very discouraging discovery. Entrance to the Bell mansion would be by ticket only. Military passes were not enough. Halwood cursed his stupidity for not having foreseen this natural regulation. Civilians were as free as the rank of the army to attend the masque, if invited; hence the necessity of tickets. Getting Lydyg to one side, he informed him of their plight. The latter grimaced behind his mask; then whispered—

"Sit on the wall under this tree and wait for me."

"What do you propose doing?"

"I can tell you better when I come back."

With that he was gone. Had Halwood followed him he would have noticed that his steps were unsteady, that at times he even lurched heavily and excused himself in a thick voice. It was the age of heavy drinking, and no gentleman lost caste if overcome by his cups. There was much good natured chaffing as the Long Rifle disrupted groups of cavaliers, knights, gnomes, and whatnot. Halwood believed he had waited fully a half hour when, at the end of ten minutes, Lydyg suddenly halted before him, thrust a piece of cardboard into his hand, and hurriedly whispered:

"Got to be mighty smart and get to the door ahead of them. Young subaltern, ready to curl up from drink. T'other one comes from an officer of the Grenadiers. Tried to get a brace from citizens, but didn't have time to work it."

Facing the risk of finding the owners of the missing tickets arguing with the major-domo at the entrance, the two pressed forward. As they reached the door, and saw a man at a small table behind the servant, Halwood felt a cold chill traverse his spine. The hall was, purposely, but dimly lighted. The ticket taker was completely muffled in a black cloak; but there was no disguising the bony hand and skeletal digits that stretched forward to receive the tickets. Each piece of pasteboard was accorded a quick glance, and a check was made on the long list of invited guests.

Halwood was first at the small table. He carelessly dropped his ticket and passed on. Lydyg faithfully imitated this show of unconcern and followed his

companion into a small reception room, where a silent group of men were circling around a huge punch bowl and surreptitiously lifting the flaps of their masks in order to drink. Halwood nudged his companion, and stood his long rifle in a corner before taking his place at the bowl. When the two emerged from the room and mounted the stairs to the ballroom on the third floor, neither was encumbered by a type of weapon that Blidgett would be sure to remember. As they reached the top of the first flight they heard loud voices, thick with drink, arguing at the door. The hissing, sibilant voice of Blidgett requested the complainants to lift their masks so he might identify them. They paused to hear no more.

On this, the second floor, were retiring rooms for the ladies, where, by the aid of candle light and tall mirrors, madame and daughter might repair any damage to exquisite costumes caused by the crush on the stairs. From these rooms streamed fairies and elves, queens and dancing girls, peasants and great ladies, Indian and demure Quaker maids. It was a grand parade of family jewels, and the whatnots of feminine conceits; all to beguile the interest of the male and stimulate his curiosity. Lydyg felt a twinge of regret that he could not have been in such a gathering prior to his reform.

Halwood made what haste he could to gain the third floor, as he momentarily expected to feel a bony hand clamp down on his shoulder and a hissing command to remove his mask. The interlopers halted just inside the entrance of the long ballroom, brought to a standstill by the silence. Along the sides of the room a strange and silent company was seated. Few there knew the identity of any figure on either side. Forward courtiers whispered tentatively in striving to learn whether plain or beautiful faces were behind the masks.

Halwood sensed the danger of remaining so conspicuous. He touched Lydyg's arm and led the way into the second row of chairs. The greater number of the guests sat stiffly and in silence, and stared steadily at a group around a small dais at the upper end of the room.

Sir William was easily recognized by his person and careless ease in lounging on a divan. To further proclaim his identity, he wore the ensignia of a Knight of the Bath. He ignored the silent watchers and stared steadily at the woman seated on the little throne. She was gorgeous in silver lace and stars of gold. All of that silent, watchful company knew her to be Nancy Doane, a country girl who had caught Sir William's lasting fancy. As Queen of Night she would long be remembered. Those who had gazed on her unmasked face believed she would never be forgotten. Wild rumors that Sir William would take her to England, make her his lady if her prudery persisted, had had the town by the ears these many weeks. When she isolated herself in Plumstead a procession of couriers rode there with Sir William's scrawled missives, begging her to return.

Halwood saw nothing but the girl until Lydyg nudged his elbow and whispered—

"Must be a million folks here."

Then Halwood took notice of four score tall mirrors along the walls, which duplicated over and over again the splendor of the assemblage. Two heralds in silver and gold suddenly appeared, one on each side of the queen, and sounded their trumpets. Trumpets of gold and silver answered from the hallway, and preceded a weird, grotesque, beautiful procession. Halwood easily recognized Moses Doane from his indolent, lounging gait and huge bulk. Some queer conceit had impelled him to assume the stark, ghastly rôle of a headsman. His big ax caused many to shrink in disgust, or horror; and some with fear. When the trumpeters reached the dais the line halted; and Sir William and the Queen of Night, followed by their suite, took the lead.

As the double line slowly moved along to the accompaniment of hidden music of wailing sweetness, those who were seated fell in and lengthened the pageant until goddesses and nondescripts marched four

abreast. The Long Rifles were the last to take their places, and Halwood was wishing he and Lydyg were not similarly disguised. Also, he regretted that their costumes should strike so sharply the American note.

AFTER this flashing kaleidoscope of color had twice circled the hall, Sir William and his queen returned to their places and the gay motley resumed their former places. The trumpeters sounded shrill notes and the music began again, this time weirdly grotesque; and from the hall entered a figure that caused many a fair maiden to catch her breath in fear and aversion, and many a courtier to wonder if his own record were clear. There was no hiding the man's identity. In the dim light his black fleshings scarcely could be discerned, while the white outlines of a skeleton became tremendously real. Even at a short distance the illusion was almost perfect. With cunning artistry Blidgett accentuated the effect by wearing over his head what appeared to be a human skull. His was the *danse macabre*, the dance of death, a most gruesome presentation for an occasion of merrymaking. As he danced Blidgett would pause at regular intervals, and in pantomine would seek a victim among the shrinking spectators.

Moses Doane, now high in the favor of a shepherdess, handled his beheading ax nervously as Death approached, and the shepherdess developed symptoms of hysteria. At first Halwood believed Blidgett was to pass Nancy's brother, and he did all but pass by, only to wheel with dramatic effect and point his bony finger. Moses started violently and dropped his ax with a crash. This bit of awkwardness caused nervous laughter. Blidgett swung on, displaying a technique of much merit, although it was repellent even to the atmosphere of moldy tombs. Blidgett gained the head of the hall.

Nancy Doane shrank as the hideous creature paused before her. She gave a little cry of fear as the dancer's arm straightened; and the bony hand would have pointed at her. Halwood started to advance, thinking the girl was about to swoon. But Sir William interposed his body to block her view of Death and in his heavy voice called out:

"Enough of this damned nonsense. Let the dancing begin."

Pirouetting swiftly, Death made his exit, his dancing now signifying great exultation. It seemed as if his slimly supported neck must snap and let his skull roll on the floor. As he passed the two Long Rifles he slowed his mad gyrations, inclined his head and stared at Halwood and Lydyg.

As the company were about to form for a quadrille, Sir Henry Clinton entered the room, followed by several of his officers, none being in costume. Sir Henry walked to the upper end of the room, unescorted, and spoke briefly to Sir William. Then he retired, as business-like and determined as his predecessor had been lackadaisical.

"For God's sake let's get out of here," whispered Lydyg. "Death's after us."

"There's something important brewing," murmured Halwood. "We must learn what it's about."

As they rose to withdraw there was a bit of confusion at the head of the room. Sir William was protesting with gestures and softly spoken sentiments, and the Queen of Night was insisting on taking leave. With a low curtsy she hastened down the hall, her withdrawal so precipitate as to discourage any offer of an escort. The Americans waited until she had passed them before retiring to the hall. Halwood supposed the girl's nervousness was but temporary, and he was surprised to see her tripping down the stairs. The lower hall was deserted except for four men garbed in black. The girl quickly passed through the doorway, and Halwood was startled to see the four men following her closely.

He descended to the lower hall in reckless haste. Instinct was warning him that Nancy Doane needed help as she never had needed it before. Lydyg was at

his heels as he gained the outer air. Before the open door stood a black coach and on the box was what appeared to be a skeleton. A muffled shriek testified to the girl's discovery of the gruesome sight. Then the four men were roughly bundling the belle of Philadelphia into the coach, and one leaped in after her.

Death, the driver, shook the reins, and the heavy vehicle rolled away. The three men in black turned back to detain the Long Rifles. Instantly the heavy weapons rose and fell like flails, and Lydyg was pursuing the coach with a speed that surpassed that of the horses. Halwood started to follow, and then ran in the opposite direction. There was but one place to which Blidgett would take his prisoner: the Kinney house. Straining every nerve, he cut across the grounds of the Howe residence and gained the rear of the Kinney premises. He had discarded the long rifle and now he was fumbling for the key to the front door of the mansion. He was at the door, and had let himself in, and had locked it by the time the coach turned the corner of High Street. He ran up the stairs and found the door of his old room locked. A smash sent it flying inward. It seemed as if it were but yesterday that he last crossed over the rafters. Pushing his pistol ahead, he quickly swung himself up and recovered the weapon, and felt for the beams as he advanced to the third story across the division wall.

What new traps the Ferret had laid he knew not, nor paused to consider. Pistol in hand, he dropped to the floor and ran lightly down the dark stairway. His extended hand swept the wall and found the mirror. With one wrench he tore it loose.

One tall taper was burning at the head of the stairs leading to the ground floor. More candles were lighted in the lower hall. By leaning over the bannister he saw that the back room, where he had recovered the two torn letters, was well illuminated. He tore away the mirror at the head of the stairs and waited. If he had guessed wrong, only Lydyg stood between Nancy Doane and a terrible fate.

There came the sound of wheels and the rattle of a key in the door. The portal swung open and he heard the rasping, hissing voice commanding:

"Keep the coach here. Stay with it."

Then the door closed, the key turned and Blidgett was carrying a muffled figure into the rear room. He carried her as easily as a child carries a doll. As the cloak was withdrawn Halwood got a glimpse of a pale face, and eyes wide with a terror that bordered on madness. During the ride her hands had been tied and a cord drawn tightly between her teeth to prevent any outcry. There was a mirror at the foot of the stairs, but it was tilted to catch reflections from the glass now lying on the upper hall floor. Keeping in a reclining position to escape picturing himself in its telltale surface, the Virginian worked down to the hall and took a position against the wall.

HE HEARD the girl gasping for breath; but he was quickly assured by hearing Blidgett say—

"Take time, you little fool, and get your breath."

Halwood pictured the prisoner's awful fear. Blidgett's appearance alone was sufficient to shake the stoutest nerves.

"Mistress Doane," began Blidgett, "I have known for a long time that you were an American spy, and working against his Gracious Majesty. Do not deny it."

"Let me go!" begged the prisoner.

"Tell the truth, and you shall roam as widely as you will."

"That knife! Put it away. It frightens me!"

Halwood crept closer. Blidgett laughed in his peculiar manner, his staring hollow eyes seeming to increase in size.

"You heard Sir Henry Clinton talk with Sir William. What did he say? I'll have it, if I have to cut your pretty face to pieces. Speak!"

The girl remained silent. Suddenly she cried in a quavering voice:

"Where are you going? What are you doing?"

Blidgett snarled like a cat and struck her across the face. Then he was saying:

"Some one has been here. Some of your friends. My mirrors on the floor above are not working."

There was the sound of a slight struggle and Blidgett said:

"There! You'll sound no alarm while I'm gone. I'll be back soon. Be ready to talk."

He stepped into the hall and beheld the Virginian standing against the wall. With a startled scream Blidgett turned to get back to his prisoner. Halwood fired, shooting the master spy through the body. The man went down, but so tenacious was his purpose, although on the point of death, he managed to drag himself half over the threshold on his elbows. Then Halwood was in the room. He scooped the girl up in his arms, and raced up the two flights of stairs through the darkness. Down below the men pounded heavily on the door and called Blidgett by name. Some one in authority was crying in the King's name for Blidgett to answer.

Working in the darkness, with a finger keeping the blade from touching Nancy's flesh, Halwood removed the rope gag and then freed her of her bonds.

"I'm about to boost you up on the rafters. Keep quiet after I get you there," he whispered.

"Enos Halwood," she murmured faintly.

He lifted her up to the edge of the small opening under the roof, and Nancy assisted him with her remaining strength. In a second he was beside her, and guiding her through the inky darkness to the wardrobe. He dropped down and helped her to descend. Taking her hand, he led her down to the ground floor and cautiously unlocked and opened the door. He could hear men exclaiming wildly in Blidgett's apartments. The coach seemed to be deserted.

Picking up the girl, Halwood ran to it and thrust her inside. He was about to mount the box when a figure came toward him out of the darkness. The Virginian raised his empty pistol to hurl as a missile, but dropped his arm on hearing the cleverest thief softly calling:

"Halwood! Enos Halwood!"

"Get up on the box. Drive out where we can reach our horses!"

Almost instantly the lumbering vehicle began to move. It was in the road. Men were yelling after it from Blidgett's doorway. The whip cracked and the coach lurched around a corner. Lydyg slowed down and called out:

"Horsemen coming! Have your Clinton pass ready!"

Two men galloped up, one on either side. They called on Lydyg to halt.

"You'll catch it for bothering us," snarled Lydyg.

One of the men seized a carriage lamp and held it up to the window. He beheld the belle of the city in the arms of a shadowy figure. Then a hand came forward and held the forged pass against the glass.

"Very good, sir. Sorry to disturb you. No intrusion was intended, sir."

With that the two men rode back toward the Kinney house. Lydyg used his whip and made for the open country. Once clear of the thickly settled portion of the town he reined in, tore open the door and announced:

"On foot from now on, Major Halwood. There'll be too much light mighty soon."

Already a dull glow was painting the clouds over the city. Bells were clanging wildly. The dull roar of an excited mob was adding to the confusion.

"What has happened, Sergeant?" demanded Halwood.

"I set fire in the back of the house to hold their attention and to decoy Blidgett away. Follow me down this lane if the lady can walk. Or we can take turns carrying her."

For a mile Nancy nearly ran the two men off their feet, such wings did terror lend her. Then she collapsed and fell. Halwood carried her over his shoulder, his long, springy strides never seeming to tire. Lydyg offered to relieve him of his burden and was refused. Cocks were

crowing when they reached the horses.

"We'll take you to Plumstead, where you can hide," said Halwood.

"No! I must reach an American outpost with the latest news," she protested.

"The unknown spy!" Halwood cried.

"Why else should I run such hideous risks in Philadelphia?" she asked.

"What's your news, Nancy Doane? I'm Major Halwood, now. My companion is Sergeant Lydyg. The cleverest —sergeant in the American army . . . And you thought I'd turned my coat, and warned General Wayne against me."

"I believed it. I'm gloriously happy to know I was mistaken. But I sent word about Moses taking a horse herd to town, and asked them not to hurt him as he was my brother. Of course I would warn the Americans against you when I believed you were for the British. But it hurt me more than you can ever know, Enos.

"This is my news. Now it is the Sabbath. By night Clinton starts five thousand men under General Grant to attack Lafayette at Barren Hill. Clinton will leave Philadelphia before the middle of June. He goes back to New York by land. He planned to go by sea, but feared head winds would hold him back and allow General Washington to cross the Jerseys and capture New York before he could arrive."

"Lydyg, ride with the news! I'll follow with it once I can get Mistress Doane to a place of safety. Go at once!"

The crisp order was promptly obeyed. The bells of the town were ringing while brooms of sparks from the ill-omened mansion were sweeping the heavens. Halwood spoke soothingly to the impatient mare and got a foot in the stirrup. He swung into the saddle with the girl in his arms. He wheeled about and rode like a streak. By early morning he was far back from the city and in the old growth, through which rushed a stream fed bank-full by the spring rains.

After Nancy Doane had managed to make her toilet, Halwood asked—

"Who was your messenger to Valley Forge, dear?"

"Marshall of the Long Walk. God forgive me for ever doubting you, Enos. But there was the little drummer boy in the Provost you said you'd remember. And then you were in high favor at headquarters, drinking and gambling, and an intimate of that terrible man with the head of a dead man."

"Aye. And he's dead for certain, now. Where can I take you that is safe?"

"Now we've found each other, you must leave me?"

"I must report for duty, of course. I must get word to Wayne, for fear something happens to Lydyg."

"Yes, Enos. You must report for duty. But sometime you will come for me?"

"Did the British army keep me from coming last night? I'll come for you."

"Get me a horse. I know where I am. I can make Chester County and find friends who will hide me till the army leaves. God give you come soon."

"Very soon."

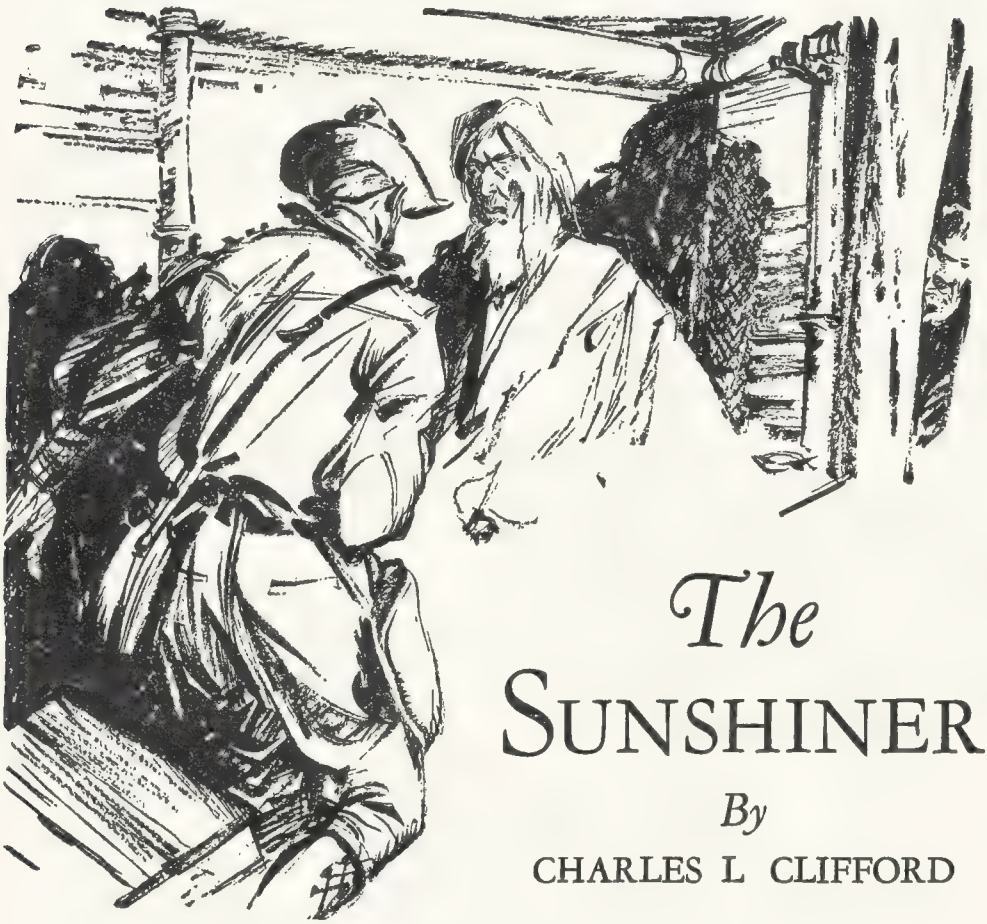
But the guns of Monmouth and many another battlefield were to be heard the length and breadth of the new Republic, and the climax at Yorktown must be reached before Nancy Doane would see the Virginian again. When he did come she ran to meet him, and in his eyes she was as fresh and radiant as she was the first day he saw her. In him she beheld a young man with much gray in his hair, and a face that was seamed by what he had suffered and seen others suffer. But there was no aging of his eager eyes, and as she gave him welcome he threw off his ragged hat and sighed in blissful content. He knew he had finished traveling over the dark road. He had come home.

"And Lydyg?" she asked, after a silence.

"At Yorktown—storming the advance battery on the enemy's left. His name was read in regimental orders, and he was given a volley. Never was there a more loyal friend."

THE END

A Story of the Philippine Scouts



The SUNSHINER

By

CHARLES L CLIFFORD

CARDINE looked up from the whisky-poker game, annoyed. Something in the young lieutenant's face, as he stood on the top step of the club porch, brought the Scout captain out of his chair. He threw his cards, face down, on the table.

"Just a minute," he said to the other players.

They reached for their drinks.

"That kid'll get hell," Del Alamo said.

"Well, he ought to know Cardine by this time."

"Thank the Lord I got a quiet company," Monihan said, sipping his sun-down Scotch complacently. "Sure, I've never seen it to fail but these prize outfits, winnin' all the field days an' banners for efficiency an' the little tin cups for wall scalin', an all—sure thim are the fella's need a constant eye on them in garrison. Lave Cardine have the great field soldiers—it's meself that's satisfied with an outfit can do a dacent manual of arms an' turn in a good guard."

The others grunted assent. They were a little jealous of Cardine and his turbulent men.

Cardine led his grave faced lieutenant to a far corner of the porch.

"What is it, Hoyt?" he said quietly.

"It's Balut, sir," the youngster said in a low voice. "I sent him to the guardhouse as you ordered. But he got away from the guard, somehow. Now he's well on his way to the hills I suppose. Cabanatan thinks he's headed for Dato Ali's *cotta* . . . He got the guard's rifle and belt, sir . . ."

Cardine stared at the frighened boy, grim comprehension dawning in his hard eyes.

"Killed him, then."

"Yes, sir—Buchat. Must have jumped him. Struck him with his own bayonet. We found him in that bunch of bamboo along the back road to the guardhouse."

"Served him right," Cardine said. "I swore all along that Balut wasn't a true Illocano. The men are damned fools if they couldn't see it."

"Cabanatan said so, too, sir. He thinks Balut was in Bilibid before he joined up with us in Manila. Says he never did speak the dialect like the others. He claimed to have left Illocos Norte when a youngster and worked on boats in the Visayas."

"A Moro ladrone more likely," Cardine said. "Well, let's go. I want to talk to Cabanatan. Too late to follow him now, but we'll turn out the outfit in the morning."

Cardine's investigation at the barracks brought out little more than the lieutenant had told him. The first sergeant, old Cabanatan, shook his bristly black head with chagrin. He talked excitedly in the dialect with his captain. The men were all ashamed. The soldiers of the other companies were laughing at them. Already there had been several fights over the matter. They ridiculed men who did not recognize a wolf in sheep's clothing. The men of the 60th objected to being called sheep. Hence the fights.

Cardine was grimly comforted by the fact that the regular Army major was absent on leave. As senior captain he was in command of the post. And as such he had authority to order the march after Balut. For months now he had begged Greeley, the major, to give him permission to go in after Ali. His men needed the field work, he pleaded. But that did not seem sufficient excuse to the immature brevet major who had a lovely berth and no desire to jeopardize it with department headquarters.

Now was Cardine's chance. He would use Balut as the excuse for his foray. If he chose to take his company in pursuit of a deserter and murderer, who was to say him no? Especially as he could prove that he had reason to believe that Balut would seek refuge in the haven of the outlaw Ali?

He gave orders for the company to march, full pack, at daylight. The news spread like fire through the barracks. As he strode toward the club across the parade, he could hear the yells of his men. His own heart rose high. What did he care for the insignificant Balut? What he wanted was to reblood his fighting men, who were softening with overfeeding and lack of work in a garrisoned post.

That night two sentries were cut down on their posts by the bay. Their rifles and belts were gone. Not a trace of their murderers was discovered by the relief of the guard who found them, lying on their faces, in the bamboo.

Cardine told this news to his men as he looked down their rigid line in the first gray light of the morning.

BEFORE the sun was well up the 60th Company had crossed the Nituan and were strung along the trail to Buldoon in a compact, purposeful column of file. The little brown men bent under their heavy packs, their bayoneted rifles swung well up on their shoulders. In and out of the packed masses of jungle trees they went, slipping and scraping over the grassy trail through the high *cogon* grass of the clearings. The sun beat hot on them in the open. In the dark aisles of the jungle it made bright, scattered patches on the warm mold under their ploughing feet.

Away ahead, the point, peering, skulking, noting every new break to a twig or

bend to a frond of grass, covered the advance with the cunning and eagerness of old hounds quartering for a blood scent. Some space behind them, at the head of his men, strode Cardine. His campaign hat was pushed far back from his streaming forehead, his olive drab shirt, stuck, black-wet against his broad back. Against his hip a heavy revolver jogged. His face was hard set.

The little men said nothing. They well understood the penalty for one word of speech. They struggled on at each other's heels, casting cat-like glances into the tangle of *bajucca* and bamboo at the sides of the trail. In each one's mind was the same thought:

"I am odd—or even—number. At the sound of a shot, or the *capitan's* whistle, I face to the side. At the same instant I fall to my knee—I unlock my piece. Then I kill that Moro nearest to me . . ."

So it had always been. There was no need for that kind of order.

But the jungle sounds told them nothing. Above them ran, screaming, squads and platoons of monkeys, leaping through the high branches of the trees—*chungos*, harmless little fellows, their insatiable curiosity overcoming their wild fright and outrage at this invasion of their habitat. Shrieking birds of fantastic color flashed across their path. The little soldiers looked up at them, followed their glorious trajectory through the deep green of the bush with pleased eyes. White cockatoos, parrots, the little parrakeets; and, above all, circling slowly against the sun, the black specks that were buzzards. Waiting, watching, relentlessly following . . .

The column approached a clearing. Cardine could see the blinding brightness of the sun through the narrow cañon of the trail ahead. A connecting file of the point, just inside the dark of the trees, held up a warning hand. Cardine raised his own hand. The men behind him stopped in their tracks, sank to their knees.

He hurried forward.

Before him was a great meadow, rising gradually to a low hill. Beyond, the grassy plain sloped down to the tangled mass of the continuing jungle. At the top of the rise a stout *nipa* thatched house rose high above the *cogon*, balanced on sturdy logs. An ordinary Moro shack, but somehow Cardine was puzzled at its solitary location. A year ago, he was certain, it had not been here.

He swept the hut and the open space with his glasses. He knew that the men of his point were somewhere, crawling, or crouched like cats, in that gently waving grass before him. But there was not a sound, not a sign of moving life.

Then out of the grass, almost at his feet, squirmed the corporal of his vanguard. His face was expressionless. He shrank against the giant tree that hid Cardine. He pointed carefully through the screen of vines toward the hut.

"No Moro," he said simply.

"Empty?" whispered Cardine.

"No, señor. White man—American I think."

"Impossible," Cardine muttered. "There are no white men this far in the *bosque*. The sunshiners stick to the *barrios*."

The corporal nodded his head doggedly.

"*Seguro, Capitan—es Americano.* I have myself gone very close and on all sides. There is not a sign of a woman. Who but an American would live without a woman?"

Cardine did not smile. The deduction, he realized, was sound.

He looked carefully around the clearing and then up at the high sun.

"He is within?" he said to the corporal.

"*Sí, señor*—alone."

"Go back to the *teniente*," Cardine said to the man. "Tell him we make the noon halt back there along the stream—and to make sure the march outpost. I go into that house to talk with the owner."

The corporal repeated the order *verbatim* in sing-song Spanish. It was a rule of the Scouts to give orders in English or Spanish. The use of the dialect took liberties with discipline. Many old-timers claimed it lessened the respect of the men if a white officer condescended to

use the native tongue. Cardine paid no attention to rules made by others. He knew his men. His instinct guided him. In deep anger, hurling insult, he used the dialect. To his first sergeant he spoke English. His ordinary orders, except the prescribed words of drill book command, he issued in Spanish. In spite of the annual report of inspectors from Manila, there were not a half dozen men in his company who knew a word of Spanish.

"The Spaniards put the fear of God in them," he once said. "Why let them forget? *They* never called them 'brown brothers' . . ."

Cardine strode boldly into the open and walked rapidly toward the *nipa* hut on the hill. No mangy curs or fluttering fowls greeted his approach. No goats, no rolling, fat faced babies. A desolate, oppressive stillness wrapped the place.

"Not a damned soul there," he thought. "What would he live on?"

But, knowing his men, Cardine knew that some one was in that silent house.

A BAMBOO fence, new, stoutly woven, and its little garden, surrounded the place. Cardine put his hand on the gate. He loosened the revolver in his holster.

Then he noted a sturdy native pony tethered under the house.

"Any one there?" he called.

A man appeared in the open doorway.

He stood rigid, staring down at Cardine. He was a remarkable figure of a man. Tall, gaunt almost to the point of emaciation, he had startling light blue eyes in his yellow face. A tangled beard, streaked with dirty gray, hung almost to his chest. He wore a ragged native *camisa*, torn open at his throat. His ripped trousers had once been issue—blue denim fatigue clothes of the Army. He wore no shoes. His gnarled yellow toes curled over the door sill with the prehensile clinging of an ape.

He glared menacingly at Cardine.

He pushed a Krag carbine out from his hip as a man might thrust forward a pistol.

"Get out!" he said thickly.

Cardine stood quietly, meeting his scowl with calm scrutiny.

"Oh, it's *you!*—A long way from the beach, eh?"

A deep color mounted into the man's sallow face.

"Don't—don't taunt me that way—*Candler!*"

The triumphant viciousness in his voice as he uttered that name had the effect of a physical blow on the man facing him. His face went dead white. His hand leaped to his revolver butt. A snarling grin exposed ragged, blackened teeth in the beachcomber's loose mouth.

"You didn't think you'd get away with that forever, did you—with me over here?"

Cardine steadied himself.

"Who are you?" he said thickly.

The other grinned, pushing his face closer.

"Look at me closely, Candler. Not at my feet—I haven't been to a pedicure latterly." He laughed a nasty, half hysterical laugh. "And don't look closely at the clothes—they're the best I could do. But not bad for a beachcomber, eh? Came out of your own storeroom at that."

Cardine didn't answer. His fierce eyes bored into those of the other man.

"Who are you?" he said harshly. "I've got a company on the march out there. I haven't time to waste with you or your sort. Do you want to go on with us—carrying a pack?"

An ugly glow came into the beachcomber's eyes.

"Damn you!" he said softly. "It would be like you. You've got a rotten name in the country here. Killer—slave driver . . . Yes, you rotten skunk, you'd put a pack on a white man's back and drive him with the *cargadores*—just to give those cutthroats of yours a laugh."

His shoulders slumped forward. The rifle grounded at his feet. The light went out of his eyes.

"Come into the house," he said sullenly.

He stood aside and waved his hand toward the dark interior.

Cardine watched him a moment. Then briskly he entered the shack.

The place was bare save for a rough table, several light packing boxes, evidently used for chairs, and a few native rugs, or *patates*, on the floor of hewn logs. The beachcomber pushed a box toward Cardine with a thrust of his knee.

"Sit down," he said.

There was a bottle of Scotch on the table, a tin canteen cup, a chipped mug. The beachcomber poured out two drinks. He added a little water from an earthenware jug to his own. He lifted the tin cup to his lips and sneered over it at Cardine.

"The 1st Horse!" he said distinctly.

Cardine started.

"*Salud!*" the beachcomber said, and drank.

Cardine had never taken his eyes from the ugly, besotted face.

"Lord!" he said. "Garton!"

The other lowered his cup, which he had emptied in a gulp. He bowed mockingly.

"*Captain* Garton—if you please!"

His face hardened. He leaned across the table toward Cardine, his fingers fondling the whisky bottle.

"Now look here, you," he said. "I've been waiting for this day a long while. You've swaggered and bullied around this province, cutting up innocent natives, stirring up trouble—"

"Stop!" Cardine said, and he lifted his hands above the table. They clenched in the other's face. "I'll choke the words in your lying throat!"

The beachcomber drew back before the threat in Cardine's eyes. He knew enough about this man to know that his words meant acts—instant acts. Yet the bitterness in him drove him on.

"You can't pull that hard boiled stuff on me, Candler. I know too much about you. It was easy to get by in the Rough Riders. There was too much excitement then; nobody gave a damn what a man's name was as long as he could soldier—and I'll grant you could do that. But you didn't fool me—not for long. I knew you were Harvard; still, none of the others seemed to have known you."

"I was in the medical school," Cardine said in a dull voice.

"You were Candler, the man who had killed his instructor. A surgeon, wasn't he?"

"He was torturing a dog," Cardine said in a flat voice, his eyes staring through the sashless window. "Pinned down, no anesthetic . . . Its eyes were crazy with fright. I couldn't stand it, and Mackey called me yellow. Yes, I hit him and I killed him—damn him!"

The other laughed.

"So vivisection got you—a little blood frightened the hero Cardine?" He leered at the Scout officer.

"You're not drinking," he mocked.

"I don't drink with thieves," Cardine said.

The other scowled.

"That story is a lie. The funds were not actually in my charge. I hadn't taken over, legally, anyway. Before I relieved Cotter some houseboy got to them—"

"That's not what the court decided," Cardine said quietly. "You were morally responsible; and as your first sergeant, I warned you at the time to lay off the booze and check and sign up for your property."

"Yes, damn you, so you told the court. I tried to tell them then you were a murderer but they shut me up. Kicked me out of the Service on circumstantial evidence. And the reward you got was a commission in the Scouts." His voice rose almost to hysteria. "Right now the natives say you're getting bribe money from the Datos—money to keep your butchering Illocanos out of their peaceful towns—"

Cardine was at his throat, choking his wild words. He hurled him to the floor with such violence that the shack shook. He glared at the abject figure on the floor.

"I ought to kill you," he said hoarsely, half drawing his revolver.

The man whined—

"For God's sake don't kill me." His evident terror disgusted Cardine. "I'm not a murderer," he said bitterly.

THE beachcomber got shakily to his feet and reached for the bottle. He gulped some of the whisky, the top of the bottle rattling against his fang-like teeth.

Cardine said grimly—

"Sit down there."

The man sank to one of the upturned boxes. He stared up at the Scout with a sidelong, hunted look.

"Garton," Cardine said quietly, "I'm beginning to see things now. I've missed ammunition. Rifles have disappeared from the ordnance storehouse. Moros would never have thought of using a brace and bit to cut out a hole in the floor . . ."

The beachcomber cowered before the cold blue eyes fixed relentlessly on his own.

"I swear—I swear to God, Candler—"

"Don't ever use that name again," Cardine said softly. "Not unless you want to die."

"No—no—I won't," the man stuttered.

Cardine went on, carefully:

"I've seen you in the *barrio*, drunk—covered with flies—the native curs sniffing at your naked feet . . ."

Garton said nothing. His eyes dropped to the floor. A faint flush came into his yellow face.

"I had to live," he muttered. "And the natives aren't like your people—my people—not Christians. They don't drive a hungry man from their steps."

Cardine scowled at him.

"Yes; I drove you from my barracks, Garton. I didn't know you at the time."

"You kicked me down your steps," Garton whined.

"And if I'd known who you were—I'd have kicked you harder," Cardine said. "It's white men like you that make it hard for the natives to respect us over here. The British in India won't allow it, nor the Spaniards when they had this place. They deported white men who disgraced their race, Garton."

The other man said nothing. He just sat and stared at his naked feet. From under the house Cardine could hear the restless stamping of the native pony. At last he said:

"Garton, I think I've got this whole thing figured out. For a long time we've wondered how Ali got his dope—a hunting trip up the Cotabato in the launches was cut up, and that practise march the 59th Company made to Malabang. Sentries have been knocked off walking post, and only last week a pit detail on the range was mangled after the troops marched back into the post."

The beachcomber squirmed under the cold, accusing eyes.

"Before God, Can—Cardine, I never had a hand in it. Do you think I'd want my own people to—"

Cardine held up his hand.

"*Your own people*—Lord, Garton, you haven't any people. You'd sell your lousy soul for a *grande* of *vino*."

Garton began a monotonous sobbing. He rubbed his talon-like hands across his red eyes.

Cardine went on relentlessly:

"You were in with Balut. I remember now he was talking with you on the barrack steps when I came along that day."

Garton whined piteously.

"I was only asking him for shotgun ammunition, I swear, Cardine. Just a few shells for the old shotgun I got; and I promised your mess sergeant I'd give him half the meat—"

"Shut your lying mouth," Cardine said. "Where is Balut?"

The other man sobbed aloud. He crawled to Cardine's feet and reached his bony fingers upward. Cardine backed away from him.

"Don't pull any sob stuff on me, Garton. I know damned well a gin hound like you doesn't live in the jungle like this from choice—and he doesn't get whisky often."

He pointed a finger at the whisky bottle.

"Garton, the money for that stuff came from Ali. Balut was in this house last night."

It was a stroke in the dark, but Cardine had made a successful one before. And now his hunch was overpowering.

"Ugh!" Cardine grunted, and he strode impatiently by the cowering man on the floor. A curtained doorway confronted him.

"What's in there?" he said suddenly.

A wild light of fear came into the beachcomber's face.

"No! Don't go in there!"

He leaped to his feet and grabbed frantically at the Scout officer. Cardine threw him off, quick suspicion gleaming in his eyes.

"Get out of my way, Garton!"

His hand closed on his revolver butt. Cold caution came into his eyes.

"My God! Don't, don't, Cardine! It's just my woman in there. She's wild—wild as a deer. Never saw a white man—and she's sick. You'd scare her to death."

CARDINE ignored him. Slowly he raised his revolver and held it level with his hip as he moved toward the curtain. The native pony below whinnied. Cardine stopped in his tracks and listened. Clearly he could hear the animal's feet moving . . .

"What a damned fool I've been!"

He heard the thud of racing hoofs beyond the house. He leaped to the door and down the steps, calling to his men as he ran. Rifles banged out in quick succession from the jungle edge. He could see his men, standing in the high *cogon*, firing rapidly. At the far end of the trail, where it disappeared again into the jungle, he saw the native pony, its ears laid flat against its head, bobbing in great leaps toward the shelter of the trees. And low on the pony's back, lashing its quarters with frenzied strokes of a *bijucca* switch, lay a half naked brown man.

"Balut!" Cardine yelled, and he fired his revolver with impotent rage after the flying pony.

Cardine shoved the gun back into its holster with an oath. His lieutenant, accompanied by the corporal of the march outpost, tore through the grass toward him, panting.

"Get the company moving, Mr. Hoyt," Cardine said coldly. "And you, Celosa, push your point on fast."

They left him. They ran back through the grass, shouting to the men. Cardine turned. He stared up at Garton, who stood white faced in the doorway of the hut.

"You—you filthy cur, you!" Cardine said softly. "I ought to do for you, Garton."

The beachcomber trembled. His eyes clung, fascinated, to the cold blue ones damning him. His crooked fingers twisted and writhed together in front of him. His loose mouth fell open.

"God, Cardine, let me be! I swear to God I mean you no harm. I'll never mention a word of what I know. I never have yet, down here, so help me!"

"Shut up!" Cardine said. "I don't give a damn what you tell. I don't think when I get through with you, though, you'll be able to talk again, Garton."

Garton's eyes started from his head. He began to tremble so that he had to lean against the door frame to steady himself.

"No, no, no! For God's sake don't turn me over to those butchers of yours! I'll tell you everything—I swear before heaven!"

"Don't drag God into it, Garton. Go back in there and get those rifles and those belts—stolen from my murdered men."

Cardine pointed back into the house. The man before him seemed about to collapse. He hung against the side of the door. Cardine could see that his knees trembled so that he was incapable of movement. He turned to one of his men, who stood watching him alertly through the high top of the grass.

"Barcut, *alica dito!*"

The little soldier was at his side on the run.

"Search that house," Cardine directed sharply. "Turn what you find over to the

first sergeant—rifles and ammunition. *Sigue!*"

The soldier bounded into the house. In a few moments he appeared, grinning, with Garton's Krag and two Springfield rifles over his shoulder. Draped over his stout back were several web belts, heavy with ammunition.

"*Hay mucho balas, Capitan,*" he said. "There's lots of ammunition."

"Beat it!" Cardine said, and he jerked his thumb toward the advancing column, just appearing through the *cogon.*

Garton had collected himself a little. His eyes were still shifting with fright, but his mouth had tightened. Cardine thought, as he watched him, that there must be still left in the wreckage of a once good soldier, just a spark of that old-time bravado. He waited for Garton to speak.

The beachcomber swallowed and lifted his head a little.

"Cardine," he said, "I know what you think. But it's wrong. I'm a bum, I know it—a beachcomber, a sunshiner. I'm not fit for a decent white man to talk to."

He raised his hands in a gesture of appeal. For an instant, Cardine thought, there was an odd attractiveness about the thin face.

"Cardine," he continued, steadily, "as you respect your profession, as you hope some day for mercy yourself, give me a chance."

Cardine said coldly:

"I intend to give you a chance. When this job is over you'll get a fair trial, Garton . . . But not back in the post where a lot of chicken hearted officers will sit in comfort around a big table smoking good cigars and feeling sorry for you because once you were a top soldier. No, Garton, you don't deserve a chance like that—"

The man broke in, pleading piteously.

"I swear, Cardine, if you give me that chance I won't say a word about you—"

Cardine silenced him with an ugly movement.

"Garton," he said carefully, "I'm not taking any chances. I've lived that kid thing down. I've made a name for decent soldiering out here, and I'm not going to have any rotten sunshiner start talk about me."

The beachcomber again started a wild protest.

"Shut up!" Cardine said. "It's not that that stops me. If I thought you'd get what was coming to you back there I wouldn't give a damn what you said about me. The sort of men who soldier in the Scouts would understand it—what one among them hasn't killed a man? No, Garton, you'll be judged by the men whose comrades died last night while doing their duty. A court of my noncoms would have a better slant on your activities than any lot of officers alive. When they come out of this scrap with Ali and have a look at their dead and wounded, then we'll let them consider you, Garton, the man who made those casualties necessary."

"My God, Cardine! You wouldn't. They'd have your commission for it. It's illegal. You can't put enlisted men on a court—have them try a civilian. No such thing could happen!"

"It's going to happen," Cardine said.

He turned to the approaching column.

"Cabanatan!" he called.

The first sergeant trotted from the column. He stood stolidly at his captain's side, staring impassively into his face.

"Yes, sir?"

Cardine jerked his finger toward the shaking Garton.

"Put that man under guard at the rear of the column. If he makes a funny move, or lags behind for a second, have him shot. Do you understand?"

The old first sergeant looked briefly up at the beachcomber.

"Yes, sir," he said softly, and he started up the steps.

ALI'S *cotta* topped one of the steep, bare hills that lay beyond the plains of Buldoon. Its location was no secret. For several years now the outlaw Dato had scoured the surrounding farm land, sneaking back into his fortress with the

women and cattle of the peaceful lowlanders. There were many outraged *taos* eager to guide Cardine's avenging column —but Cardine needed no guide. Once before he had suffered a bloody repulse against this very Ali, and had been withdrawn by a highly incensed Manila cable before he wiped out that shame.

The thin light of early dawn picked out the black bulk of scattered trees. The morning breeze rustled the wave-like *cogon*. Bud Talo rose before them, smooth of slope, devoid of cover, innocent in the hush of dawn. There was not a sound save the tentative, faintly inquiring chatter of young monkeys who peered from the edge of the tree line down into the thick grass and wondered at the great, silent crawling things moving slowly upward.

Cardine, glasses at his eyes, stood against a giant tree and watched his men break cover. Cabanatan stood beside him, peering solemnly up at the mud walls of the *cotta*, etched boldly against the quickening sky. At their feet sat Garton, pale, an exhausted figure of a man. The killing pace of the march had almost done for him. This was his first moment of blessed peace.

Cardine said quietly: "We'll never make it without dynamite. Have the squad ready, Sergeant."

"*Siempre listo*—always ready," the old man replied simply.

"Let's go," Cardine said.

A soldier behind Cardine touched his sleeve. He pointed to the shivering Garton.

"*Que hay sobre el*—What about him?" Cardine scowled.

"You stay here with him. Keep under cover, both of you. If he gets away you know what will happen to you."

An ugly look came into the pock marked face of the little soldier. He was losing the glory of battle for this sunshiner. He lifted his rifle and shook it in his hand. He glared down at Garton.

"*Si, Señor Capitan,*" he said softly.

Cardine blew his whistle and dropped his field glasses against his chest.

"Let's go!" he called out.

There was a great rustling in the long grass. Cardine knew that he had little to gain by stealth. Already Balut had arrived with the news, and hundreds of grinning Moros were peering through those slotted walls.

A wild yell came from the *cotta*. Suddenly its wall was black with dancing, gesticulating figures.

"Fire at will!" Cardine shouted.

The *cogon* flattened as before a great burst of wind as the long line of rifles crashed. The early light gleamed flatly on a hundred bayonets. The air was filled with a swishing, sighing sound. Ricochets screamed from stone and tree.

"They're using *lantakas*," Cardine said to Cabanatan.

"They make big holes," the first sergeant said. "Many nails and things like that in them."

Men began to fall. The Moro fire increased.

"Lord!" Cardine muttered. "They must have five hundred rifles there— Tell those fools to keep down!"

The Moro fire beat them down. The advance had reached the end of the high *cogon*. From here up the wily Ali had cleared his field of fire. For two hundred yards there was not a blade of grass, a tree, a solitary rock behind which a man could seek cover.

Cardine lay near the edge of the grass behind a low stump. He studied the *cotta* walls carefully through his glasses. Then, bit by bit, he searched the intervening ground. Ah! About halfway up that bleak slope he noted a break. A mere fold in the ground—but for men lying prone, sufficient protection to justify building up a line for the final assault.

Cardine called a messenger to him. The man crawled, breathing hard with excitement, close to his elbow.

"Get around to the rear of the hill," Cardine said carefully, "and tell the lieutenant I want his platoon to open a very heavy fire at once—but not to advance until I send him further orders or he sees that we assault. You understand?"

The man repeated the message word for word, then was off.

Again Cardine studied that fateful hundred yards of barren ground. Should he push forward by infiltration, thin lines, or one sudden, heroic rush? The last would give him the benefit of surprise.

He sent the order for a general race forward along the line. A short blast on his whistle would be the signal. Everything was ready. The Moro fire had lulled. Afraid to waste precious ammunition, probably, until the crisis of the action. The Scouts made no target lying in the high *cogon*.

Cardine blew his whistle, leaped to his feet and led the rush of his men. For the first few seconds the Moros were taken completely by surprise. Then came a terrific hail of fire. Each man, bent like a sprinter, eye on the bit of cover opposite his place in the line, raced with death. On they went, some pitching forward and lying kicking, twitching, their helpless bodies shaken with slugs from the *cotta*. Some, on hands and knees, or dragging flat on their stomachs, crawled back to where the litter bearers waited in the thin cover of the trees.

But most of the line made it.

FOR A TIME they lay close under the blessed bank, panting, shaking with the excitement and tremendous physical effort. Not a shot was fired in reply to the stream of lead blinding them with flying dirt and dust. But beyond the hill Cardine could hear the reassuring thumping of the rifles of his lieutenant's platoon. So far, so good.

"Cabanatan!"

"Here, Captain!"

Cardine rolled on to his side. The faithful old first sergeant lay beside him, grinning ferociously.

"It's pretty good, eh Captain? We don't lose so many men."

"Not so damned good—yet," Cardine said, breathing hard. "Got to get that bombing squad off. Pass the word to stand by to cover them with fire. Once up against the *cotta* they're safe enough."

The old man looked at Cardine's set face curiously, then his hard black eyes peered upward at the sky.

"Captain," he said quietly, "I think not one man of that squad he will get to that wall."

Cardine narrowed his eyes. The old man knew that look. He felt a little ashamed.

"I only mean, Captain—"

Cardine said, surprisingly:

"I guess you're right. I won't order them. Send the word along for volunteers. Any one can light a fuse."

Cabanatan passed the word. A little later he nudged Cardine. A broad grin was on his flat face.

"The same as always—they all like to take that dynamite."

"Lord!" Cardine muttered—but a soft light was in his eyes. The year in barracks had done no harm . . .

"There remain five of the regular squad," Cabanatan said quietly.

Cardine knew he meant that the other three had fallen in the rush. He said nothing for a long moment. Then—

"Have them go at my whistle."

The old man nodded.

The word was passed. Looking down the line of flat bodies, Cardine could see the men snapping off their safeties, easing their rifle muzzles close to the lip of the ridge.

"The devils are tickled to death," he muttered, and he grinned at the line of brown faces twisted to watch him.

He blew his whistle. He followed with his eyes the five little brown soldiers leaping up and, with their arms clutching their sinister burden, racing forward toward the wall. He thought—

"Lord, if one of those packets is hit it will blow them all to bits."

None of the packets was hit—But three of the men were. One managed to drag himself back to the cover of the ridge. The other two lay flat and still where they had fallen. Two won through. Cardine could see them, jumping with excitement, flat against the *cotta* wall. They were

covered from overhead fire by the coping of the wall, and from the loopholes because of their narrowness and the thickness of the *cotta*.

Cardine peered through the bit of parapet he had dug up with his knife in front of him. Could the two do the job? All they had to do was lob the spitting sticks of dynamite over the wall and into the interior of the *cotta*. No Moro on earth could stand that. Dynamite had more than a physical power to them. It defied their conception of force. Besides its devastating horror, it seemed an occult thing. The few times it had been used against them it had broken their fighting spirit to the level of *taos*. Cardine was aware of this. He had seen it used at Baksak and he knew that Ali had no conception of it. It was his trump card to revenge him for that last little meeting with the native when he had had none with him.

"Why in hell don't they get busy?" Cardine muttered.

Cabanatan said: "Because, Captain, they have not the little wick you light. It is under the bodies."

It dawned upon Cardine what the old man meant.

"The fools!" he said. "Haven't they been taught to divide the fuses up? I'll try Mingas for that."

"Mingas," the first sergeant said, "is one of those."

He poked his finger toward the parapet in the direction of the still bodies between them and the *cotta*.

"Send a man back to the packs," Cardine said. "Tell him to bring all they've got up here. Quick, now!"

Less than a minute later a little racing figure flew like a deer down the steep hill and disappeared safely into the trees below. So sudden was his movement, and so unexpected the direction, that the Moros aimed hardly a shot at his fleeing body.

Cardine turned to Cabanatan.

"Now," he said, "it's a question of his getting back. Pass the word for a volunteer to take the stuff up to the *cotta* if he does get back."

The first sergeant shouted out the order. Names came back along the line. Some of the men laughed.

"Many care to go," Cabanatan said, simply. "I think, maybe, Santos is best. He win the hundred at the last field day."

"Tell him to tie the stuff to a stone and throw it up to them if he gets hit," Cardine said.

He stared back impatiently toward the trees where the aid station and the packs were hidden. The men on the firing line had ceased their fire. They squirmed about in their restricted positions and watched for the soldier who had gone for the fuses. A loud cry broke from them as he darted out into the fire swept open.

"Shut those damned fools up!" Cardine yelled. He blew his whistle furiously.

But the harm was done. The howl of encouragement proved the doom of the gallant little soldier. Every Moro rifle opened in his direction as he came tearing on. Fifty yards from the tree line he pitched to the ground. He tried to struggle up. A stream of bullets pelted him to the ground. He lay, in a furious cloud of dust, still at last.

"*Jesus, Maria, Josep!*" Cabanatan said softly. "No got fuse."

The Moro fire continued to spit about the riddled body, to lace the trees beyond like a sudden gale of wind. From the fox holes of the Scouts, torn up with the entrenching tools they had taken from the packs, came an answering, spiteful fire.

Cardine cursed loudly.

"*Puta nga le mo s!*" he yelled, and he blew a long blast on his whistle.

"Cut out that firing!"

The firing ceased. He heard the men laugh. Damn them, they thought the whole thing was a joke!

The men peered through little holes in their individual parapets at the *cotta*. Cardine could see the frantic eagerness in their eyes. Their legs twitched to be gone. They wanted to get up there with their bright bayonets . . .

Cabanatan nudged Cardine.

"*Mira—mira!*"

CARDINE followed his jerking finger. Standing over the inert figure of the fuse volunteer was the sunshiner. Cardine watched, stupefied, as the tattered caricature of a man bent, calm and unhurried, and rolled the dead soldier over almost reverently. Carefully he gathered together the packets of fuse.

Cardine was more amazed at his eluding his guard than at the incredible sight of this craven standing unshaken by the Moro fire.

With the calm prescience of his race, the old first sergeant muttered—

"Vicencia stop one back there."

That, of course, was it. The little guard, eager to see the excitement beyond his cover, had left that cover once too often.

Cardine watched the sunshiner, speechless.

A low murmur ran down the line. The men turned their heads stiffly and watched, their eyes gleaming with sudden understanding.

"*No tienes temor de las balas*—" they said.

"*Uno momento!*" Cabanatan chuckled. "In a minute now he get it!"

But the Moro bullets did not bring the sunshiner down. Cardine saw him make a sudden clutch at his shoulder and half spin about. He was so close that the fierce twist of pain in his face told that he had been hit.

"He'll never make it," Cardine said. "Damn the idiot for trying!"

But he did make it.

Suddenly, panting, bleeding, he threw himself down behind Cardine. A wild yell went up from the men.

"You fool!" Cardine said.

The man lay on his stomach, one red smeared hand pressed against his shoulder. Cardine noticed the blood running in bright scarlet streaks through his claw-like fingers. His breath came in great wracking sobs. His eyes stared, dog-like, at Cardine.

"You fool!" Cardine said. "What happened to the man I left with you?"

The sunshiner continued to pant, trying futilely to gasp out words.

Cardine's hard blue eyes bored into the derelict.

"Hit, I suppose—dead—or you'd never be here."

Garton nodded, his chin bumping into the dirt. He shoved the oilskin packets of fuses towards Cardine.

"This what you wanted?" he gasped.

Cardine reached for them, but the sunshiner shook his head. He drew them under him as though protecting a cherished thing from alien hands.

"No," he muttered. "Give me just a minute—for the love of God!"

"In another minute," Cardine said contemptuously, "we may be cut to hell out of here. Ali may get wise, then we'll have a pretty little *barong* rush. He won't chance dynamite against those superstitious apes of his if he can beat us to it."

"I'll push on," Garton breathed. "Tell them to open up—cover the bamboo tubes near the ground."

Cardine stared at the man as though he had struck him across the mouth. The sunshiner met his stare with stubborn stolidity. His whole face seemed changed from a dissolute looseness suddenly to the embodiment of fierce resolution. Even Cardine was impressed by that look.

"For heaven's sake—"

The other pleaded swiftly.

"Listen, Cardine—you've got to give me my chance. I'm a white man, whether you like it or not. And I was an officer . . ."

Cardine's eyes never left the man.

"Tell Santos to stand by," he said to Cabanatan.

"More better let this one go," Cabanatan said softly. "Santos he is expert rifleman, Captain."

"Damn you—pass on that word!" Cardine snarled.

Cabanatan shrugged. The captain always was angry in a fight. He shouted the order down the line.

The derelict clenched his hands. He half rose to his knees in the frenzy of his appeal.

"For the love of heaven, Cardine, save

me from the shame of standing up before *gugus!* You know what the sentence will be. Give me a chance to wipe this thing out like a white man. There isn't a chance I'll come out alive!"

"Not if you don't get your block down," Cardine said, and he shoved the man against the ground with his hand.

A wild, eerie yell came from the *cotta*.

"*Cuidado juramentados*—look out for *barong* rush!" Cabanatan called calmly down the line.

An exultant mutter of understanding went down the firing line.

"*Juramentado! Listo, listo!*"

They were fatalistically delighted with the prospect of meeting, steel against steel, a berserker rush of five hundred mad Moros foresworn to death in the killing of infidel swine.

CARDINE noticed that the sunshiner's eyes glowed like a madman's at the sound of that blood curdling babble of sound. He suddenly remembered that once the man before him had been recommended for the Medal of Honor at Peking. That recommendation had, of course, been withdrawn in the light of later events. And suddenly, as he stared, the man seemed to be hurled as by a giant spring from beneath him. In his rush Cardine was beaten to the ground. For a second he lay there dazed, his eyes clouded with dirt.

"*Muy bueno*," sighed Cabanatan. "More better—"

Cardine rubbed the dust from his eyes.

A great clamor of triumph rose from the line.

"He make it," Cabanatan said. "More better not shoot. Moro never know he is coming."

"I ought to shoot him from here," Cardine muttered.

He watched Garton, trembling like a man with desperate fever, pressed flat against the *cotta* wall.

"He got guts," Cabanatan said tentatively.

"*Had* guts—once," Cardine said. "Rotten fright made him pull that."

"*Por supuesto!*" Cabanatan murmured agreeably.

But Cardine wasn't listening. He was watching the sunshiner, who used to lie in the *barrios* with flies on his feet, expertly fix fuses to long yellow sticks. The two little men beside him against the *cotta* wall worked fast. They handed him the sticks from the pouches at their feet, with steady hands. Then, carefully, they set the improvised bombs in a neat pile against the wall.

Cardine's heart pounded.

"God!" he muttered. "You'd think they were on a fatigue job!"

"More better go slow with such stuff," Cabanatan said placidly. "Now they go."

Cabanatan meant that they were about to heave the greatest horror a Moro ever encountered into the crowded *cotta*—on to the heads of warrior and woman alike.

Cardine noted that the coping of the wall would prevent the three men from standing back and hurling the stuff over the edge. If they got out far enough to insure a safe trajectory, they would undoubtedly get hit by snipers in the corners of the bastions. He held his breath. He could see Garton talking earnestly to the two Scouts. They nodded. With quick, expert movements, they passed him up so that the three stood as the anchor men of a wall scaling team.

Cabanatan chuckled.

"*Bueno!*" he said.

Garton stood balancing on the shoulders of the upper man. For a single instant he turned from the wall, and Cardine knew that he was looking for him. Then, quickly, he turned back and reached his tattered arm down. The little men below him passed up the yellow sticks. Garton steadied himself with his left hand against the wall. Slowly his right arm swung back and out, then looped upward with the smooth sweep of a bowler. The sun flashed on a long, shiny, tumbling tube which leaped from his hand. It rose to the apex of its graceful arc, hung poised the merest fraction of a second. It dropped from sight. In its wake a thin

blur of grayish smoke marked its passage.

Hardly had it dropped from sight when another left that sweeping arm.

There was a tense, dread silence. Not a gun spoke. Even the Moros seemed to know that some great issue hung on that strange smoking thing that dropped softly into their crowded midst. So still it was that the men on the line could clearly hear the cautious, warning cries from inside the *cotta*.

"Pig! Pig!"

They thought, in their simplicity, that the hated infidel defiled their home with the filthy pig—there was grease in that thin paper covering . . .

The ground shook with a terrific shock. A great geyser of dirt and débris leaped high above the *cotta*, for a moment blotting out the early sun. A pall of dirty smoke hovered. Drowning the wild wail from within, came another; like a great, beating pulse they echoed—one, two, three—four, five, six. The earth kept shaking. Mangled bodies from inside the walls blew high into the air.

"Up and at 'em!" yelled Cardine, and he was halfway to the shaking walls before his stupefied men caught their cue. They too were astounded at the havoc these little sticks had wrought.

Then they sprang up, echoing the strange cry of their captain. They sang out the same words, exultantly, not knowing the meaning of a single one.

NOT A SHOT greeted them. Enough for the Moros to cope with the devil within. They cowered, and rushed in panic stricken frenzy toward the rear wall of the *cotta*. Like maniac monkeys they scaled the walls and dropped on to the bayonets of Hoyt's waiting platoon. Many escaped by extreme agility, leaping like goats into the jungle below.

Over the front wall poured the maddened Scouts. Wall scaling records were torn to bits this day. First on the wall, high above them, stood Cardine. He waved his smoking revolver for them to come on. Cabanatan grunted up to his side, his ugly face dark with the unusual exertion.

"*Sigue! Sigue mas!*" he screamed down at them. "*Alica dito. Maca de toy!*"

They scrambled toward him, their brown faces alight. Twenty feet they leaped down from the wall, ripping their bayonets into the naked bodies below them. Fiends incarnate, blood lusting beyond control . . .

Cardine stood on the wall, smiling grimly down at them. Now and then he fired his revolver, lifting it from his thigh with a quick flick of his wrist. Cabanatan watched him, an unholy light on his pock marked face.

"Where's that cursed Ali?" Cardine said.

Cabanatan knew. He was not sure whether it was yet time to tell. You could never be sure with El Cardine. It might be that he, himself, would be blamed. At last he said:

"He go 'way. I see the green *tubo* on his head run fast into the forest."

Cardine dropped his revolver by his side. He stared down at the quieting horror below. A soldier pointed a dripping bayonet up at him. He grinned evilly, nodding his head at a bloody mass under his feet.

"Balut—" the soldier said.

"Thank God for that, anyway," Cardine muttered. "Have the trumpeter blow cease firing."

Later, after he had taken the report of casualties and given his orders for the return march, Cardine sat against the sunlit wall of the *cotta* and lighted his pipe. A soldier handed him a steaming tin cup of coffee. He drank it slowly, looking down at the quiet trees below. He could hear Cabanatan's shrill voice hurling commands at the burial detail.

Cabanatan appeared, grinning.

"Not so bad, Captain. We lose only seben—and the wounded all get well."

Cardine grunted. The coffee tasted good.

"What about that—" The first sergeant raised his eyebrows. It always annoyed Cardine when Cabanatan raised

his eyebrows. Too damned intellectual for a Filipino. "Well, what about him—the *Americano?*"

That word cost Cardine an effort.

The old soldier grinned. He shook his head.

"He get his, I think. He got guts with him, that man."

Cardine sipped his coffee.

"Don't bring him in," he said, looking into his cup. "And bury him alone. Savvy?"

"Yes, sir," Cabanatan said, and he walked away shaking his bare head.

Cardine got up. He walked slowly around the bullet scarred wall of the *cotta*. Better blow this place up, he thought.

He had pulled off a trick he had hankered to pull for a year. And yet he felt sour. That sunshiner—that Garton. What rotten tricks life played on men. The fellow must have had some decency in him then. He had spotted a man, hounded by newspaper publicity, in the ranks of the Rough Riders, and had held his peace. True, the plea of self-defense had been sustained, as Mackey had struck first. Yet the stigma would have been there, among those Harvard men.

And later, when Garton had taken over a new company during the Boxer trouble as a volunteer captain, and again encountered the same man using the same false name, he had said nothing. Was he consciously a benign Nemesis, or had he planned to use this knowledge of his new first sergeant's past? No one would ever know, now. A lousy few thousand dollars, booze, and probably a yellow haired Eurasian. Things like that—useless things, nothings, to break a man . . .

Cardine turned the corner of the wall. Sitting propped against the base of the mud breastwork was the sunshiner. His face was dead white, his eyes ghastly hollows. His clothes were in rags about him. He was twisting an already bloody first aid bandage about his upper arm. He struggled to his feet at sight of Cardine.

"Sit down," Cardine said gruffly. "So you're alive?"

The sunshiner said nothing. He sank back on his lean haunches and looked steadily up at Cardine. For a long while there was silence. These two men who had once soldiered honestly, honorably together, watched each other. A high bugle call rang out breaking the somber stillness that lay between them. The 60th Company, finished with battle, breakfast and burial, were falling in to march back to their *dalagas*. In a few minutes the walls of this blood soaked *cotta* would roar up into the air and after the first shrill cries of the monkeys, an eternal quiet would once more reign in the jungle.

The sunshiner rose unsteadily to his feet at the sound of that call.

"Well," he said, looking steadily into those still blue eyes confronting him, "what happens to me?"

Cardine said nothing.

"I want you to know," the other said slowly, "that I never helped a Moro kill a white man. I harbored Balut because I had come to hate you all—all white men because of what they had done to me. I was weak, and drunk, and guilty of neglect, but before God, Cardine, I never stole."

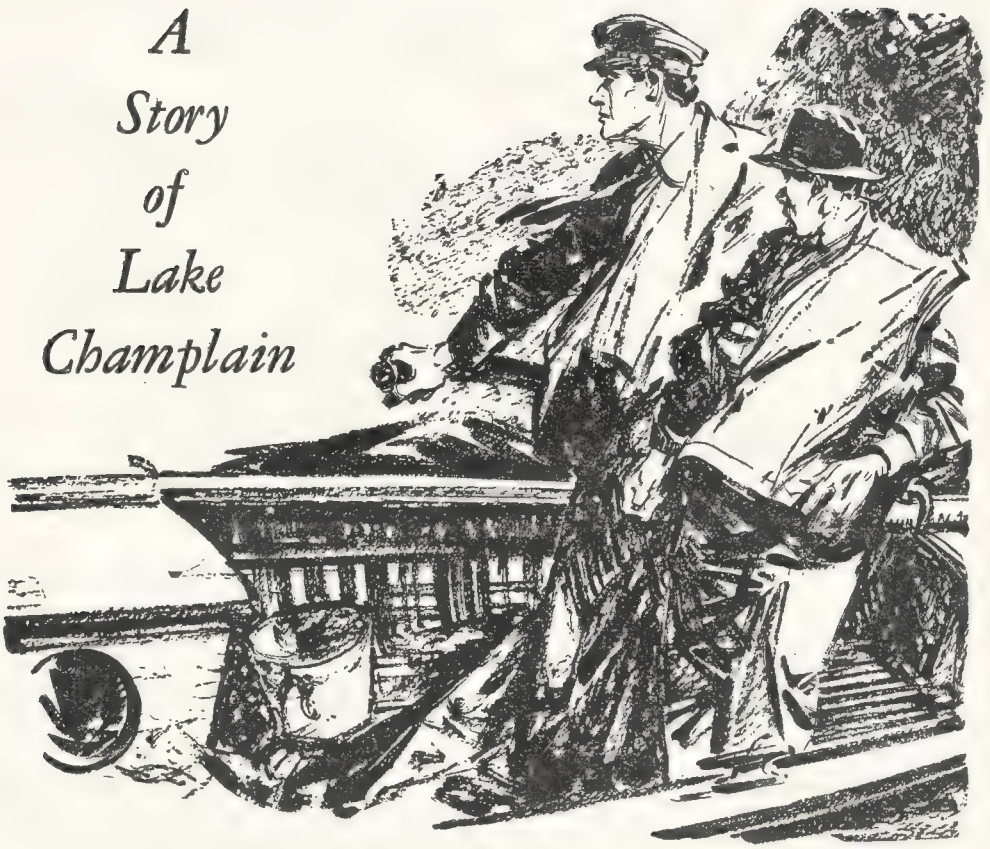
He stared away toward where the eager Scouts were crowding into ranks. A soft smile came into his face.

"I went down after that. I'm what you say, Cardine—a sunshiner. I tried to make one final effort and got the little shack in the jungle. Balut brought me the whisky, and then I knew it was no go." He turned and raised his arms in a hopeless gesture. "Leave me here—do one final act of mercy . . ."

Softness came into those bleak eyes of Cardine. He held out his hand to the sunshiner. His arm slipped about the shaking shoulders.

"Better beat it back there now before they empty the coffee can out. It'll set you up. You're going home, old-timer—on the next boat . . ."

A Story of Lake Champlain



PARSON JOHN

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

"PARSON" JOHN TUCKER got up from the table where sat the heavy shouldered Mingo Bashaw and Tucker's friend, Jimmy Farr. He left them waiting there for him to speak and walked to the kitchen stove; with deliberation he raised a griddle and knocked out his pipe. Then he looked out through a window of his house at the brown stretch of Bildad Road, winding into the forest; he turned and gazed down over the bluff at Lake Champlain, gay with the sparkle of autumn sunlight. There was nothing out there to tell him whether he should throw in with Jimmy and Bashaw, and take his cut of a thousand dollars.

His small sloop, the *Nancy Belle*, rode at her mooring a little way offshore. It was mainly on account of the sloop that those two wanted him in with them; the *Nancy Belle* meant more than anything, although of course everybody on the Road knew that he could handle himself in a scrap and keep cool in trouble. They knew he would stick. Jimmy had reason to remember that; since the time, two winters ago, when he had pretty nearly

got his head kicked off in a lumber camp row. Parson John turned back to the table and sat down.

Mingo leaned forward with a glass of cider in his stubby paw. His mouth was a slit; his eyes murky. Even on Bildad Road, where nobody was particular, Mingo was called a bad lot. It was different with Jimmy; he was younger, with a laugh in his voice and a light in his handsome brown eyes. Most of his trouble came from just plain foolishness. Now in this present business he was likely to burn his fingers, and badly. John Tucker sighed.

"Boys," he said, and unconsciously he straightened his mighty shoulders until the back of the wooden chair in which he sat creaked, "I don't feel like going into this with you."

"Scairt," sneered Bashaw.

He banged his heavy glass on the table. Zeke, the Parson's hound, looked up with mournful inquiry. Jimmy Farr frowned and grew tense; he seemed to have some difficulty in keeping his voice down.

"No wonder they've always called you 'Parson' John Tucker! What's the matter with you, anyway?"

Tucker filled his pipe and lighted it. He met their eyes calmly; knowing better than to tell them that he had hesitated only because he hoped to see some way of getting Farr out of it.

"Got to chop for winter, and get up a woodpile," he said. "And the hunting season's on and I want to get me a deer. And—"

"Dumb!" snorted Mingo. "Your share of one trip'll be about three hundred. Every chink we bring down the lake from Canady in the *Nancy Belle* means a thousand. I told you that. All you got to do is sail back and forth, not too often. Jest the way you ramble around now, duck shooting and one thing another. You can buy wood and hire a man to put it into the stove for ye. Where's your sense?"

"I've always been able to go around these mountains on my hind legs whenever I felt like it," replied Tucker slowly. "If I was locked up I couldn't do it. Besides, I think 'most as much of the *Nancy Belle* as I do of Zeke, there. I don't want to lose her."

"Cold feet!"

Again there was an ugly sneer in the voice of Mingo Bashaw; and again Zeke raised his head wearily and looked at his master with a speculative eye.

"My feet," answered Parson John, "are warm enough to suit me."

"Let it ride a minute, Mingo," interposed Farr, although it was clear that he himself was suppressing a fierce anger. "John, we've been friends?"

"Yes," agreed Tucker, in a tone entirely different to the one he used addressing Bashaw.

"Lemme borrow your sloop—or rent it; or buy it and I'll pay you so much a month."

"Jimmy," said the Parson, "if you needed the *Nancy Belle* I'd give her to you. You don't need her. And I don't want to sell. I can use her very handily myself."

Farr blazed suddenly. A hand that lay on the table clenched and his face grew dark with blood.

"That's the kind of a friend you are!" he exclaimed thickly.

"What's come over you, Jimmy?" asked Tucker, with sorrow and anxiety crowding his throat. "You don't act natural lately."

"I can tell you," growled the thoroughly enraged Mingo. "The boat ain't the hull thing! Nor yet the money for bringing in the chinks! I'll tell you why. It's—"

"Shut up!" barked Farr. He half rose from his chair and Tucker thought for an instant that he was going to leap at Bashaw. "Don't drag anything into this that ain't in it now. When you get mad you talk too much."

"Oh, all right," grunted Bashaw. "I guess I know enough to keep my mouth shut. But if you don't like the way I act I can get me another pardner. I'm the one that knows the game, and has got the hook-up in Canady." He lowered his eyes from Tucker's steady gaze.

JIMMY FARR quieted while Tucker looked from one to the other of the men there with him, and wondered. Was it the influence of Mingo that was working on Jimmy? Within the past few weeks Farr had flamed in sudden anger at the friend with whom he had fought shoulder to shoulder; three or four times he had acted like this. What had Bashaw been about to reveal? John Tucker wished he knew.

"I don't want to fight with you," said Jimmy to his partner; but when he spoke to Parson John there was challenge in his tone. "That's the last word about the boat, is it?"

"Yes, Jimmy," answered Tucker, with a trace of sadness. "I'm sorry you take it this way. I'll even lend you money, what little I've got, to help you buy a boat. But I don't want any part of this chink smuggling."

"Pious, ain't ye?" snarled Mingo.

"Oh, yes!" Farr got to his feet and kicked his chair rattling away. "He's pious enough when he feels like it. But maybe it won't get him so far as he thinks."

Mingo Bashaw rose and Zeke, the hound, following the general movement, got up and stretched. Bashaw swung a foot at the dog as he started for the door.

"Get out of my way," he grunted.

Parson John had sat still, puzzling over what Jimmy had said, until Mingo swung that foot at Zeke. Then he left his chair like a jack-in-the-box, and his open hand at the end of a stiff arm caught Bashaw fairly on the shoulder. Mingo caromed from the side of the doorway, stumbled over the steps, and finally caught himself in the yard with the aid of the chopping block. A look of ludicrous surprise was stamped upon his face for an instant. Mingo weighed close to two hundred pounds and none of it was flabby.

"Don't kick my dog," said the Parson mildly from the doorway. "I wouldn't take that, even from Jimmy."

Bashaw still stared at him, with open mouth. Men did not handle Mingo Bashaw that way. Those who thought themselves good enough to take him on in a fight went through all the cussing and the cautious preliminaries due to a first class rough and tumble scrapper.

Farr, who had gone out ahead of Mingo, went to the rank of firewood and picked up a four foot stick about as big as a man's wrist. He weighed it in his hand, and was satisfied.

"Bend this over his head, Mingo," he said.

"I don't need no club," cried Bashaw. "When I climb that feller I'll do it with my hands and feet."

"I'd a good deal rather not have any trouble," Tucker told him, without heat, "but if your mind gets real set on fighting you can find me around here 'most any time when I'm ashore."

Plainly it was not today that Mingo Bashaw wanted to fight. Parson John watched the two go, with Zeke beside him and a weight like lead upon his heart. Normally he was a cheerful soul but the blow that had been struck this day was heavy. He was one of those men who take friendship seriously and he could think of but few things worse than having his friend turn against him. Moreover, if the cause was what he had begun to suspect, then things were as bad as they could be.

Women, cards and liquor will sometimes make bad blood between men—if the men have it in them to get that way—and the greatest of these is women. Parson John remembered now that he had seen Jimmy at Ovide Montville's shack a good many times in the past few weeks; he had seen him walking with Rosalie Montville through the October woods. Before this it had not occurred to Tucker that Jimmy Farr would do other than keep hands off. Jimmy knew that his friend worshipped Rosalie. Only to Jimmy had the Parson confided his desire to marry her. Probably Rosalie knew it, but he had not told her yet.

No one knew how the black haired, blue eyed daughter of old Ovide felt in the matter. Certainly Parson John did not. Every time he had got his courage up to

the point of asking her she had somehow managed to keep him from saying anything about a plain gold ring and a visit to the justice of the peace. By moonlight the Parson had held Rosalie's hand, sitting on the fence in front of her father's shack, but that was as far as he had got.

Parson John sat down to think. Even yet he struggled against the belief that he had lost his friend. And if Jimmy had gone back on him, and was trying to get his girl, still he did not want the young fool to get into trouble on account of smuggling Chinese. The Parson had acquired his nickname from being a little more finicky than a good many of the dwellers on Bildad Road. He would hardly have said so but he did not think it was quite right to smuggle Chinese into the country.

Zeke came up and put his head on his master's knee. He was a long, lean hound, black on top with reddish brown running gear, and he possessed an eye mournful but brimming with affection. A great comfort to a man, that dog.

"Old feller," said Tucker, as he rested a muscle padded hand on the satin smooth head, "if humans was more like dogs I'd get along a lot better."

After a time Parson John bestirred himself. He fried some pork in a big iron pan and made milk gravy to go with his boiled potatoes. Then he and Zeke ate. By the time Tucker had smoked and washed his dishes he had his mind made up about what he was going to do.

IT WAS a short walk to the dwelling of boards, tarred paper and corrugated iron where Ovide Montville had brought up his family and where now only his youngest, Rosalie, remained with him. Ovide was sitting on a soap box in front of the shack surrounded by hens, a pig, some hounds and a cat with a litter of kittens. Montville was a small man, black whiskered. He wore hoop earrings because some one had told him that they would keep off rheumatism. It was said that in his youth he had been able to chop and pile four cords of wood in a day. There was no doubt as to where Rosalie got her spirit.

"*Bonjour*, 'ello!" said Ovide. Today he added nothing to this, his usual greeting, and ordinarily he was a talker.

"Howdy," replied Tucker. "Rosalie around?"

Before Montville could reply she appeared from the shack; and never had she looked more lovely to the eyes of Parson John Tucker. The girl had left her hair long when others on Bildad Road were following the bobbing fashion and now it lay in black, fluffy masses against her cheeks. Slender, moving like a wind blown leaf, she came toward him with a grave look in her deep blue eyes and a pallor that was not unbecoming.

"Hello," she said listlessly.

"Nice day," offered Tucker.

"It is not nice day when a man is killed," she said, with a show of life. "A boy! S'pose he is bootlegger, John Tucker! It is not nice thing for that boy's mother!"

"What?" cried Parson John, bewildered. It was as though she were accusing him of something. "What's she talking about, Ovide?"

"You ain't heard doze news, *hein?* De trooper not tell you?"

"I've been at home all day," answered Tucker. "No troopers around that I know of. What's happened?"

"Teddy Wade, he is dead," said Rosalie. "They have shoot at him early this morning. His tire bus' and he go in ditch. Killed!"

"That," said Parson John, "is a darned shame!"

"How dey know he bring booze las' night?" demanded Montville. "I want to know, me!"

"Somebody have squeal'," shrugged Rosalie. "That is how they know."

"Maybe he was cutting in on somebody's business," suggested Tucker.

"By gar!" exclaimed the old man. "I'm glad I ain't doze feller dat squeal'. At night I don't have to t'ink of him dead."

Parson John looked from father to

daughter and a very unpleasant thought entered his mind. He gazed full into the troubled eyes of Rosalie.

"Want to take a little run over to the Vermont shore in the *Nancy Belle?*" he asked. If she went he would know that the unpleasant thought was not true.

"Yesterday I would have say yes. Today it is no. Teddy Wade is dead."

"What are you driving at, Rosalie?"

While she hesitated Ovide spoke, and he was more stirred than Tucker had ever seen him. He smacked a fist into his palm with a crack like a pistol shot.

"She is drive at you!" he cried. "You are friend of Jimmy Farr? Yes?"

"What about that?" asked Parson John.

"Jimmy have come here today; him and doze Bashaw bum. *Bien!* It is your friend who have say to my gal Rosalie dat you make much talk to Trooper Kenyon! You have see him yesterday? Yes?"

So that was it. Jimmy and Bashaw were trying to make him out a squealer. Bashaw for revenge, and Jimmy for another reason. That reason stood in front of Parson John now, with lips drooping and eyes filled with tears.

"Rosalie," said Tucker, "do you believe I'm that kind of a feller?"

"I have see Ned Kenyon go to your house," she replied, in a low voice. "Right off he get another man, they say, and wait for Teddy on the river road. I have see you with Kenyon other times, too."

"Yes," he told her stoutly. "But I don't have any business with him. Ned's all right."

"But is squealer all right?" asked Ovide.

"Do you think I'm one?"

"I dunno, me. Allus I like you first class."

"If it wasn't Jimmy said . . ." Rosalie thought aloud.

Now Parson John understood thoroughly that it was only because his friend had turned on him that these two doubted. Couldn't Rosalie see that it was because of her Farr had made his poisonous suggestion? Perhaps it was on her account that Jimmy was going to smuggle Chinese. He never had any money.

"Even my dog Zeke would quit me if I was what you think!" said Tucker.

Without another word he turned and walked away from the shack of Ovide Montville. He thought he heard a half choked exclamation from Rosalie but he did not look back. No hurt like this had ever before come to Parson John. With Zeke drooping behind him he went home and shut himself in.

In the kitchen John Tucker stood irresolute for a moment, staring at the familiar stove, the table, the cupboard, with unseeing eyes. Suddenly he raised a chair and swung it over his head. It crashed against the wall with a force that shook the small building; the wooden seat splintered, rungs and legs broke and clattered over the floor.

Zeke lifted his nose and emitted something halfway between a whine and a howl. It brought Parson John to himself. He dashed a hand across his eyes and sat down limply, like a sack half filled with meal. The dog came to him and leaned against his legs.

"Friend—girl— What next?" muttered the Parson.

TROUBLED sleep had at last come to John Tucker that night when there was formed in his mind a reluctant determination to make Jimmy Farr take back what he had said, or what he had hinted. Tucker did not want to hurt Jimmy but he hoped Bashaw would interfere. That would be real good luck.

Out of this restless sleep Parson John was awakened by a vast thundering at his door. He lay for a moment and listened to the volleys of pounding. Any one who routed him out between midnight and morning in that fashion must have a good reason. He slipped on his shoes. Then, with a rifle under one arm, he went down to the kitchen and lighted a lamp. Zeke was standing a few feet back from the door, head down, teeth bared. Again blows shook the house.

"Who's there?" called Tucker.

"Ned Kenyon! Let me in!"

Parson John took his rifle in his right hand, with thumb on hammer and finger inside the trigger guard, and with his left unbolted the door. Trooper Kenyon stepped into the kitchen. His hand rested on the butt of his pistol.

"What's the matter?" asked the Parson. "You made plenty of noise."

"Thought you'd gone."

The trooper closed the door and sat down wearily. Kenyon was a young fellow, but sensible. His gaze was friendly and relieved as he looked Tucker over. A man does not wear a nightshirt when he is up and about some deviltry.

"Where would I be gone?" snorted Parson John. "Do you go around waking people up to see if they're tucked into bed?"

"You might be gone wherever your boat's gone," replied Kenyon, "with whoever's in it."

"Boat?" echoed Tucker. "The *Nancy Belle?* She's moored down below!"

"She's gone from her mooring," asserted the trooper. "And I'm kind of glad you don't know it. Got an idea who stole her?"

Parson John swallowed the words that came into his throat. Of course he had an idea who had stolen the *Nancy Belle!* He put his rifle carefully down upon the table and stirred up the fire.

"I don't know who's got her," he said, gravely, "but I know I'm going to get her back. She's on Lake Champlain somewhere, that's sure. Just as quick as I can get some clothes on and a bite to eat I'm going after her."

"Tucker," said the trooper, "if I knew just who took that boat I'd probably be able to find out something else!"

"Kenyon," replied Parson John, with a grim smile, "if you'll go and find the *Nancy Belle* for me you'll get the fellers that took her!"

"No use trying to find out anything from you." Trooper Kenyon laughed briefly. "All right. If you need any help let me know. I got an idea we'd like to talk to the men that took your boat."

"I won't need any help," said the Parson, "but I'm much obliged just the same. Have a drink of my new cider?"

"Not tonight." Kenyon got up and moved to the door, where he hesitated. "If Mingo Bashaw happens to be mixed up in this boat business look out for him. He's a tough egg."

"Mingo does look kind of fierce, don't he?" agreed Tucker. "I shouldn't wonder if he'd be ugly if you fed him too much meat."

Kenyon went out, laughing and grumbling. Parson John slid the frying pan on to the stove and set water to boil for tea. This was going to be a hard trip. He felt it in his bones as he dressed and made ready to go.

Any time after dark Bashaw and Farr might have taken the *Nancy Belle* and slipped away into the night. That they were responsible Tucker had not the slightest doubt. Farr, at least, knew that Parson John Tucker would never appeal to the authorities for help; and with the aid of the mighty Bashaw he expected to be able to keep the sloop.

From the talk of yesterday Parson John knew approximately where the rendezvous in Canadian waters lay. They had not told him exactly, pending his joining up with them, but enough had been said so that he felt sure of locating his boat if he could get to the northern end of the lake before they started south on a trip. That could hardly be before another night came to give them the shelter of darkness.

Dawn was graying over the eastern mountain peaks when Tucker shut Zeke in the woodshed and went reluctantly down to the Montville shack. Ovide owned a battered hulk of a motorboat which could travel and stand weather. Until yesterday Parson John would have asked to borrow the boat, but now he wanted no favors of Ovide Montville.

Tucker pounded on the door of the shack until at last a window opened and the whiskers of the old man bristled over the sill.

"*Sacré!*" he barked. "Who's dat come on my house, *hein?*"

"John Tucker," answered the Parson brusquely. "Do you want to earn twenty-five dollars today?"

"What you say? Twenty-five dollar?"

"And pay in advance if you'll get up now and take me north in the *Julie*. I'll tell you where I want to go after we cross the Line. You can drop me and come right back."

"By gar!" exclaimed Ovide, studying him. "What for you skip to Canada? What you done now?"

"I said I wanted to go to Canada," answered Parson John. "Do you want the money?"

The murmur of the voice of Rosalie came from within the shack. Montville turned his head and fired a volley of conversation which Tucker could not understand.

"Aw right!" shouted Ovide, through the window. "You wait, Jean! I come quick!"

TUCKER sat down on the doorstep and thought bitterly of Rosalie, hurrying to get breakfast for her father. Her eyes would be dreamy with sleep, like softly clouded skies; the long black hair would lie against the white slenderness of her neck. He suppressed a groan. Some day, he had hoped, she would be getting breakfast for him. Jimmy—Rosalie—the *Nancy Belle*.

"I guess I'm beginning to get mad," he muttered. "I must have been upset to bust that chair yesterday."

When darkness sifted down over steely waters that night the clumsy but powerful *Julie* was cutting through the narrowed northern end of Lake Champlain. The boat had a large and comfortable cabin but all day Parson John Tucker had scorned it; all day he had remained in the bow, watching the lake. He did not expect to pick up the *Nancy Belle* but he was taking no chances.

Through the long hours Ovide Montville had steered and tended his engine in silence. He knew the *Julie*, relic of a past generation of motorboats, and he could get the best out of her. Today she had ridden a heavy sea, under gray skies which promised more wind, and she had done well. She bucked the wind and the miles passed behind her.

If the northwest breeze held it would take the *Nancy Belle* down the lake at her best speed, provided Tucker found her. He believed that he could get home for breakfast if his sloop lay where he expected to find her. That he might have to reckon with those who had stolen her he took into account not at all. Parson John had been growing more and more angry.

Shore lights were just beginning to show, and they had left the Line behind them, when Tucker turned and called to Ovide. He pointed to a point of land that ran out from a low, wooded shore.

"Land me on the south side of that strip, Ovide," he said, "and then you can call it a day."

Montville grunted, and spun the wheel over. The *Julie* headed inshore cautiously while Parson John looked for a possible landing place. In the gathering darkness he made out a tiny wooden wharf, evidently abandoned.

"Set me off there," he called, as he picked up a boathook.

Montville shut off the engine and they drifted in until Tucker caught the planking of the wharf and sprang ashore. He pulled out the little wad of bills that he had ready.

"Wait!" cried Ovide. "I can't take doze money from here. I pass a line to you."

Parson John made the line fast; then he leaned over the cockpit and handed the money down.

"Count it," he said, and he held his flashlight.

Montville wet his fingers and painstakingly made sure that he had twenty-five dollars.

"You don't need me no more, *hein?*"

"I don't need anybody," replied Tucker, turning away. "Good night."

He started up a grassy slope and lis-

tened, as he climbed, for the sputter and kick of the *Julie's* engine. It came at last; then gradually grew fainter on the lake. Apparently Montville had taken the wise course and gone home.

So far as John Tucker could tell from the look of things and the meager information of yesterday he had come to the right place. An abandoned private dock, an abandoned house, on a neck of land just north of the Line, west side of the lake. A village lay just to the south. He struck through a juniper grown pasture and entered a strip of woods.

By now it had grown as dark as it would be that night but light filtering through from a clouded moon enabled Tucker to go on with a degree of ease, even in the woods. It was here that he heard a step behind him; the sound of it whipped instantly away by the wind. He whirled and listened, motionless.

Probably it was some small animal prowling, he decided. The sound among the fallen leaves was not repeated. It would be useless to try to find a pursuer among the shadows, the tree trunks, the dark blots of bushes moving in the wind. After a moment of waiting Parson John went on his way.

He came out of the woods upon a little rise of cleared land overlooking the lake. Here the wind drove in and the crash of waves on a rocky shore filled his ears. Just below him was the dark outline of a building and he thought he saw a faint glow at some of the windows, as from shaded lights.

Tucker moved slowly down to the water's edge, past the house. The lights were there, but behind such heavily curtained windows that the building would not be visible either from land or water at any distance.

Parson John was sure that he was at the end of his quest when he picked up a mast against the sky. A boat was riding without lights a short distance offshore and when he found his own dinghy drawn up on a little sandy beach he knew that he had located the *Nancy Belle*. There was a skiff on the beach, alongside the dinghy, with a pair of oars lying across the seats.

Tucker shoved off in his dinghy. Again he thought he heard a step, a crunching of the sand on the beach, but by the time he had the dinghy on her course it was too late to see anything. He did not much care, now, if he had been followed; and the first time he looked over his shoulder at the *Nancy Belle* all fear of pursuit was driven from his mind.

WHERE there had been darkness a round eye of light stared at him from one of the cabin portholes. It was blotted out and it reappeared, three times. He turned and glanced shoreward. A lantern was being swung there in a brief arc. Signals!

When he pulled out from the beach Tucker had expected to find the sloop deserted. Now he knew that he would have to fight for her. He was glad, after a fashion. As the wind was whipping the troubled waters of the lake so his wrath had been whipped up until he might possibly have been disappointed without a battle.

Parson John eased himself up under the stern of the *Nancy Belle* and made the painter fast before he climbed out of the dinghy. He crawled over the low rail but there was no one aft in the cockpit and the tiller was swinging with the motion of the sloop. The light from the cabin port had been blotted out and the cabin door was shut.

Tucker walked forward to the cabin door. A murmur of voices came to him but he did not understand what was said. He did not care. All that concerned him was what he was about to do with those who had stolen his *Nancy Belle*. He took off the windbreaker that he had worn all day and dropped it. He became angrier each second. There was a growling noise in his throat as he drew back a leg and kicked the door in front of him clear of its hinges. It went the length of the cabin and slammed against the bulkhead forward. Parson John followed the door into that small compartment.

Mingo Bashaw sat on a locker with his

hands braced against the edge, in the act of rising. Jimmy Farr was frozen with a cigaret halfway to his lips. A rawboned, six foot stranger stood leaning as though he had just dodged the door. This stranger presented a pair of gimlet eyes and a jaw like the front of a lumber barge. He reached for Tucker with a powerful hand.

Parson John had never felt such rage. Bashaw or this stranger had spit tobacco juice on the white paint. His boat! His *Nancy Belle!* While the hand of the big stranger was in the air the Parson lowered his head and rammed him in the stomach. The man's breath left him in a gasp and he collapsed.

Tucker had one glimpse of him sitting on the floor with open mouth and glassy eyes. Then the capable fist of Jimmy Farr cracked against Parson John's jaw. He was driven backward a step but it was as much by surprise as by the force of that blow; never yet had the head of John Tucker been set back in a fight. Up to this instant he had not believed that his friend would strike him.

Parson John took Jimmy by the neck and squeezed once. Then he lifted him by belt and shirt collar and hurled him bodily out of the cabin. All this was a matter of but a few seconds. Mingo Bashaw would have been in it before but the others had been in front of him. Now he and the Parson met with the impact of more than four hundred pounds of seasoned bone and muscle. They reeled and struck the side of the doorway. The wall flapped out like a sheet of cardboard.

They fell and rolled aft. Mingo pounded Tucker's head against the deck. The Parson turned his enemy; then he lifted him and bent his back over the edge of a locker. But he had to let go that hold in order to clear his thumb from Bashaw's teeth. They slugged each other and the fight moved farther aft until they were under the tiller. At this moment Mingo put his knee in Tucker's stomach to hold him down while he delivered what he probably meant to be the last blow of the fight. As he raised his head and shoulders and drew back his arm Parson John struck upward. He hit Bashaw flush on the jaw, and Mingo Bashaw's head cracked against the tiller. The two hundredweight of him sagged down upon his conqueror.

Tucker got up. He shook his head to clear the mists. Shouts were coming from the shore but he paid no attention to them. The big stranger was on his mind, and Jimmy Farr. He expected one or both of them to jump him. But to his surprise the sloop was clear.

A lance of fire darted out from shore; a report came faintly against the wind. Before the second shot was fired Tucker had the mainsail ready to hoist and was working at the halyards. With sail up he ran forward and cast off. The *Nancy Belle* caught the wind and heeled over.

They were firing steadily now, and with more than one gun. Parson John leaped to the tiller. He headed the sloop out to clear the point of land and breathed a long breath of relief. A bullet thudded into the hull. Let them shoot if they wanted to. He had his boat again. He eased off the mainsheet a little and cleated it down. The firing died away gradually but Parson John had forgotten it before it stopped.

When he had the sloop where he wanted her he lashed the tiller and set the jib. Then he investigated the heaped form of Mingo Bashaw. A search yielded a pistol. Tucker heaved him up to a locker and Bashaw began to mutter. With a dash of water in his face he was able to sit erect. With his flashlight Parson John looked over his damaged prisoner.

"I guess this is a good place for you to do your swimming," said the Parson. "We're near enough shore so you won't have a chance to get real wet."

"What's that?" demanded Bashaw thickly. "Swim?"

"Swim ashore," Parson John told him. "And now's a good time to go over the port quarter—before I heave you over!"

Bashaw felt for his pistol and found it missing. He lurched to the side and put a leg over.

"You'll get it good and plenty," he promised, and slipped out of sight.

Tucker caught a glimpse of his upturned face in the water a moment later. He was all right. Parson John grinned to himself.

THE PARSON was now fairly comfortable in body; and less miserable than he had been in spirit. Of course his thumb ached from the teeth of Mingo, and there were more bruises than he could count to remind him that he had been in a tough fight. One eye was partly closed. Lips and nose felt tripled in size. But these were small matters. He held the tiller and mainsheet of the *Nancy Belle* and he was running toward home with a stiff breeze behind him.

With the sloop out in broad lake and on her course Tucker lashed the tiller again and went to inspect the damage to the cabin. The swinging lamp had gone out and this impressed him as being a little strange. He relighted it and looked about.

Things were not as bad as he had thought. The wall could be repaired easily but there would have to be a new door. He sat down and filled his pipe. Everything was dirty and disordered. It was hard to understand how Jimmy Farr could put up with that kind of company.

Parson John noticed that a low door leading to the considerable space under the forward deck was unfastened. He was about to get up and set this small matter right when slowly the door began to open, a fraction of an inch at a time.

The movement was not due to the motion of the boat for the door was a snug fit. Tucker felt his scalp prickle. Then he took a comforting hold upon the captured pistol and assured himself that nothing on land or water could be any worse to handle than Mingo Bashaw.

The door opened a foot, and more. The head and shoulders of a Chinese appeared, to remain motionless just within view. The yellow man stared, blinking in the light, at Parson John. He was scared; that much was certain.

Tucker leaped and reached for him, with due thought for a possible knife thrust. But there was no knife. He set his prisoner down upon a locker and inspected him. The man wore a suit of cheap clothing, new, and it was evident that unskilled hands had just lately given him a haircut. Suddenly he let loose a flood of crackling Chinese and pointed to the opening through which he had come.

Parson John, still somewhat dazed, kicked the door shut. Still the Chinese chattered. Tucker felt him over for concealed weapons and discovered a lump under one arm. He got it out with some difficulty for the Chinese clawed and tried to bite. The Parson had to put him face down on the deck and sit on him while he investigated the dirty leather bag which he had found. It contained more than a thousand dollars in Canadian and American bills of various denominations.

Tucker got up and returned the money. This produced surprise and joy at first; then an excited pointing at the money, himself, and the door leading under the deck.

"You stay where you are," ordered Parson John. "And for Pete's sake shut up. I want to think."

Probably the gang had not yet collected their transportation fee; he had interrupted them just as they were about to start, with their passenger newly arrived and the money on him.

It was unfortunate for John Tucker that he had not reached the *Nancy Belle* sooner; and he was now greatly concerned with his own predicament. The evidence that he was a smuggler of Chinese was perfect. He had been taken over the Line by Ovide Montville and now he was back in American waters with his own boat and a Chinese on board. As a matter of fact he had smuggled a Chinese into the United States.

It had been safe to throw Mingo Bashaw overboard anywhere near shore. But not this man. It would be murder. By this time the *Nancy Belle* was too far down the lake to beat back across the

Line before daylight. Against the wind it would be a hard trip of many hours. There was nothing to do but go on, with nowhere to go.

Again the Chinese began to chatter desperately. Tucker groaned and went out of the cabin. No watch was needed now but Parson John felt better with the night about him, and plenty of air. The hard thinking he had to do to get himself out of this scrape was worse than the battle with Mingo.

With dawn Parson John stood inshore. He was still a good half hour's run from home but he dared not take his cargo there, and the hard thinking of the past few hours had brought results of a kind. If he had all the luck in the world he might pull through.

In a little secluded cove, where wooded hills rose on three sides, he dropped anchor and pulled in the dinghy. Then he took the now docile Chinese by the arm, led him on deck, and lifted him bodily into the small boat.

They went ashore.

Straight up over the nearest hill climbed Tucker, with a firm grip on the collar of his unwelcome guest. They came out on the macadam of a highway. There was not a sound to break the morning stillness.

Parson John chose a place where he could see down a long stretch of road and there thrust the Chinese into the bushes. By a ferocious pantomime with the pistol he tried to convey the need for absolute silence.

After what seemed a long time the distant hum of a motor came. It grew so rapidly to the ear that Tucker knew this was the car he wanted. It was running about seventy and there would be no other car on this mountain road at that speed.

Parson John took his position in the middle of the road, with both weaponless hands held above his head. A powerful roadster came tearing out of the morning.

Parson John Tucker held his place resolutely.

FOR a moment it seemed that he was about to be hurled into eternity, or at least into the next county. Then howling brakes tore the peace of the mountains and the car stopped a few yards from where John Tucker stood with rocklike steadiness. A young man with a broken nose and a hard eye snapped out from under the wheel and vaulted the door. Before his feet struck the ground he had produced a pistol.

"I'd 'a' bumped anybody but you, Parson!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "What you want, anyway—holding a guy up?"

"I thought you'd be going north for a load early this morning," said Parson John easily. "I figured it was your day for a trip. I'm awful glad of it, Stoneboat!"

"What's up? You in trouble?"

"Not if you'll do me a special favor," replied Tucker.

"I'll do it if I bust a leg!" said Stoneboat promptly. "What is it?"

Parson John reached into the bushes and pulled the Chinese out.

"I want you to take this critter over the Line and set him down safe and right side up anywheres in Canada," he said. "He's got some money on him and I want he should keep it. Right?"

The youth called Stoneboat rubbed his knobby chin. It was clear that he was puzzled. But after a moment he looked at the Parson and an almost human expression came into his eyes.

"Sure I will, after what you done for me the time I was shot back in them woods." He waved his hand in the general direction of Bildad Road. "I'll take him, and he can keep his money. But you're sending him the wrong way, ain't you?"

"No!" Tucker wagged his bruised head. "You can see I been in a war of my own and this is the way I want it to end. The Chinaman goes north."

"Have it your own way!" Stoneboat lighted a cigaret and considered, with a kind of grim pleasure, the evidences of that war. "Want to take a share of the

next trip, Parson? Scotch and rum?"

"No," replied Parson John. "I've got my woodpile to get up for winter, and—"

"You're a working fool!" laughed Stoneboat. "Come on, chink. So long, Parson."

With a smooth hum the roadster was off. Tucker knew that Stoneboat would keep his word and that his passenger would be taken back over the Line, either by some unfrequented dirt road or on foot through the woods. Parson John had found Stoneboat with a bullet in his shoulder and a broken leg, left to die by hijackers. He had pulled him through with considerable trouble.

John Tucker breathed easily again as he went back to the sloop and started for home. The *Nancy Belle* bowed and dipped to the waves and the wind dropped to a good breeze. Parson John brought his boat up to the mooring in the quiet inlet under the bluff. Up there was home, with Zeke waiting in the woodshed. But for Rosalie and Jimmy Farr the Parson would have been a very happy man this morning.

The *chug-chug* of a motor sounded and Tucker twisted around so that he could see the mouth of the inlet. It was the *Julie* coming in, with old Ovide and Trooper Ned Kenyon on board. The Parson smiled. Let them come on board if they wanted to. He went about the work of furling the mainsail with deliberation.

"Hello," he said, as Kenyon came over the side and Montville made fast the *Julie*. "Nice breeze this morning! When did you get back, Ovide?"

"I got here not so long," replied Montville uneasily, as he stared at the partially wrecked cabin.

"Had some trouble?" asked Kenyon. "Want to make a complaint about boat stealing?"

"No kick coming," answered Tucker. "You fellers want to go ashore and have some breakfast with me?"

"John," said the trooper abruptly, "we've got a wire from up north saying you've brought a Chinaman in with you. How about it?"

"I've heard worse things than that about myself," chuckled the Parson. "Heard I was a squealer! What do you think of that? You can see for yourself I haven't got a chink on board. Look around. Go all through the boat."

"I believe you," said Kenyon, "but I've got to look—orders."

"All right with me, Ned."

Kenyon went forward, frowning, and into the cabin. He opened the lockers. Then he saw the small door in the bulkhead: he stooped and peered into the darkness under the forward deck. The trooper listened, and suddenly dropped to his hands and knees and went through the doorway. Parson John wondered.

"Jimmy Farr, he come down on train las' night," said Ovide. "He tole me he's damn liar, by gar! He try for make trouble on you an' Rosalie. *Sacré!* He say he punch you las' night and it make him sorry. When dey shoot at you he wake up. Den he left doze bum."

"What?" cried Parson John, joy springing up like a fountain within him. "Jimmy—"

A WILD yell bit off his words. It was a yell with power in it, fit to split the forward deck from under which it came. Trooper Ned Kenyon shot out of the cabin. He was just a little pale; and he held up a bleeding finger as he turned fiercely upon Tucker.

"What you got in there? A bobcat? Get it out here, damn quick, and let me see what kind of a menagerie you're carrying on this tub."

"Bobcat?" gasped Parson John. "My dog's all the menagerie I've got, and he's up there in the woodshed."

"Get that animal out?" barked the trooper, whose dignity had been much upset. "And make it snappy. It bit me."

Parson John, utterly mystified, gave a hitch to his belt and started forward. Was there another Chinese concealed on the boat? Had that been the meaning

of the frantic chattering of the one who had appeared?

He was as anxious as Trooper Kenyon to know what was under the deck of the *Nancy Belle*. Tucker had once crawled into a litter of bear cubs when both parents were at home and this could be no worse. Down on all fours he went in front of the dark opening. Something solid struck his sore nose. He jumped backward.

Rosalie Montville got to her feet, having managed to come gracefully through the small doorway. She was a little disheveled, and very angry. Blue fire was in her eyes. That gaze passed over Tucker's head and fixed upon Ned Kenyon.

"What for you grab me?" she demanded, in a voice musical in spite of its weight of wrath. "I don't be grabbed by mens, me!"

"So this is the answer!" cried Kenyon.

"What's the answer to what?" barked Parson John, getting to his feet. "I didn't know she was there."

"Was she bite you hard?" asked Ovide, with a glint in his eye. "She got good teeth, my Rosalie!"

"How long you been there?" demanded the Parson. "When did you get on board, Rosalie?"

"I have hide in the cabin of the *Julie* and follow you ashore las' night," sparkled Rosalie. She laughed. "I come behind you in the woods. I have take that skiff and go on the *Nancy Belle*. Me, I have pistol and while you fight Mingo Bashaw I drive Jimmy and that man big like a horse into the skiff. I make them go ashore. Then I hide and find something! A rat, Jean! I tickle that rat with pistol and make him go out. *Bon Dieu!* I am scare'! Just now I have hear you talk, and what my father say also. Now I know those thing they say of you are not true, Jean. It was to find out that I follow. But I was little bit scare' once. You know when?"

Parson John nodded. He knew all about when she had been scared. But Trooper Kenyon was standing there with a slow grin spreading on his face and silence was best just then. The Parson imagined what Rosalie and the Chinese thought when they found each other in the darkness. Suddenly he roared with laughter.

"Well," said Kenyon, "I don't know all the joke. Most of it seems to be on me, and my finger. But I don't see that it's any of my business if you have a fight and get your boat back. Or if a lady steals a ride."

"Fight, you say?" cried Rosalie. "Not plain fight. He have lick' three men at once, my Jean!"

"By gar!" murmured Ovide. "T'ree to once, *hein?* An' now she call him my Jean!"

Rosalie became of a sudden very pink and Parson John, summoning courage, touched her arm.

"Let's go," he said. "Let's go and see Zeke and Jimmy."

"Yes — my Jean," replied Rosalie meekly. "What you want for breakfas'?"

"Breakfast?" he echoed vaguely.

Parson John was not interested in food. Girl—dog—friend—boat. . . . Not one of them was lost!

"Breakfast, Rosalie? Just keep looking the way you do now! That's all I want!"

A Tale of North Borneo

BAD MONEY

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

AT FIRST Waldo thought he would kill Frink.

The homicidal idea, long lurking in subconscious regions, came stalking forth for serious consideration two days before when it became evident from persistent rumors in disreputable circles of Zamboanga that if Waldo did not hurry and grab Frink's share in their joint enterprise, the long arm of the law would do the grabbing indiscriminately. The consideration lasted during the whole trip from Zamboanga, crystallizing into decision only as the *Lombok* steamed past the bald cliffs of Bahara Island and nosed into the hot, sticky wind that swept down Sandakan Bay.

It may have been something in the hot breeze, a breath of primitive life blown across seven hundred miles of Borneo jungles, that decided Waldo. He had always regarded Frink as a primitive sort of person, despite his oily mannerisms and fat affectation of intellect. Perhaps, after all, a primitive person should be handled with such primitive methods as a knife thrust, although Waldo had always preferred cunning to cutting. He prided himself upon his wits. He depended upon them for a living, and until now had consistently ranked brains above brass knuckles. Of course, he was now in Borneo, which respects neither force nor intellect . . .

When the *Lombok* swung around a rusty little rice steamer from Saigon, and eased up to Sandakan's lone deep water pier, Waldo, standing at the rail, changed his mind again. He was at this moment looking upon civilization in the form of

the town of Sandakan. Sandakan, seen from the water, might have been a quiet hamlet on the Devon coast, such was the illusion of calm and coolness produced by its red roofs and its green hillside; illusion, which, on landing, would disintegrate into drab, steamy streets of Chinese shops; illusion of civilization which was no more than an insignificant scratch on the deceptive flank of a great, unfathomable island. Yet the illusion was sufficient to decide Waldo against killing Henry Frink. Killing was crude. A civilized crook did not have to kill to get rid of Frink and appropriate the entire capital of Borneo Manufactures, Limited. Brains would certainly triumph over a one-track mind like that of Frink! Had not Waldo always been the brains of Borneo Manufactures?

The business of Borneo Manufactures had started out innocently enough. Waldo, noticing that the Dusun women in the coastal regions of North Borneo delighted to wear girdles made of silver dollars, conceived the idea of starting a plant for the manufacture of cheap dollars. And when the dollars for Dusuns began to sell, he branched into the export trade. He found out that the Javanese notion of the height of beauty in jewelry was a bracelet of American gold coins, so he began producing ten-dollar gold pieces for Java. He figured he was doing the downtrodden peoples of Asia a service by furnishing them with popular priced gold and silver coins—all of which might have eased his conscience for past and future wrongs, had he had a conscience.

Anyhow, no one could see anything wrong with the business, because the eagle on the dollars could be easily mistaken for a rhinocerous bird, while the head on the ten-dollar gold piece bore a marked resemblance to the profile of Jack Dempsey before he had his nose done over.

By the time Frink had joined the firm, however, Waldo had put his equipment to more profitable use. He had imported a handy halfcaste engraver from Macao, and had him make a new set of dies. There were no rhinocerous birds or Dempsey profiles on the new dies, either. There was, among other things, a statuesque head of George V, Rex Imperator. This particular die was designed for a gold plated sovereign that was now in circulation in the principal ports of southeastern Asia. But the principal article turned out by Borneo Manufactures was a very serviceable twenty-dollar bill, an excellent facsimile of an American bank-note, systematically distributed from Hongkong to Surabaya via ports, by Waldo and Frink in rotation.

Frink's entrance into the firm was sudden, unwelcome, but unopposed. He knew certain things about Waldo, such as former names, and the reason for his present retirement—if it could be called that—to British North Borneo. Waldo could not very well refuse him a half interest in the firm, a partnership which led to a treachery-proof arrangement of the finances. Undivided profits were converted into American currency, wrapped in newspaper, and placed in the safe of a notary, who had instructions to deliver the packages only when the two men presented themselves together. If one of the partners came to an untimely end, the paper wrapped fund was lost to the other. This system was supposed to prevent sudden death before the liquidation of Borneo Manufactures, Limited, but Waldo did not consider for a moment that he would be thus prevented from acquiring the whole pile when the time came—as it had now come. He suspected Frink of similar designs, but he knew that Frink would be easily overcome by the guile of a well laid plan. Waldo had a plan he considered infallible—complicated, perhaps, but ingenious. He would put it into operation at once.

THEREFORE he was relieved not to see Frink about, as he stepped off the *Lombok* and walked down the dock. He had important matters to attend to before he wanted to see Frink. He made several

calls, asked questions, and loitered for twenty minutes over a gin sling before he started walking up the glaring street that followed the waterfront. Just before the street turned to leave the motley line of shops and climb the wooded hill where nestled the bungalows of bored and respectable Europeans, Waldo came to the head office of Borneo Manufactures, Limited. He paused and noticed with some interest that a bearded Sikh constable was squatting in a doorway across the street, his eyes fixed on the counterfeiting headquarters. Waldo turned and entered.

The firm of Borneo Manufactures was housed in a shabby one-story structure, similar to the score of others backed up to the bay. Waldo entered a big room containing a large desk, a small desk, a bespectacled Chinese mission educated clerk, a map, and several chairs. The front room opened into two others in the rear, which in turn opened on a small landing stage. The whole rear of the house was perched on piles. A narrow wooden runway at the side gave independent access to the landing stage.

The Chinese clerk arose deferentially as Waldo came in. Waldo nodded briefly, and passed into the back room. Closed shutters threw the room into semi-darkness, and Waldo, still blinded by the glare of the street, stood for a full minute before he could distinguish, beyond a litter of presses and tins of ink, the plump form of Henry Frink, motionless on a cot. Waldo took three rapid steps to his side and stared down on his unconscious partner.

Suddenly the chubby form came to life, and Frink arose to greet Waldo with a damp handclasp.

"Hello," he yawned. "Come in with the *Lombok?*"

Waldo didn't reply. Instead, he put a question of his own.

"Did you see the whiskers out in our front yard?"

"The constable? Yes, I noticed him before I came in for my nap."

"Has he been there long?"

"I couldn't say. Since noon, probably."

"Know what he's there for?"

Frink shrugged.

"How should I know?"

Waldo examined his partner's rotund face. He thought he had detected a flicker of agitation there, in spite of an assumed mask of complete indifference. It was Waldo's belief that Frink lived in secret terror of the police—any police of any nation. He had an idea that this fear might even outweigh the man's greed, which was considerable.

Turning his back on Frink deliberately, he fumbled in a pile of damp sacks in a corner of the room, and found a bottle of soda. He poured himself a drink before he opened his campaign . . .

"Well," said Frink, "how's business?"

"Terrible." Waldo put down his glass. He remained standing, a tall, unpleasantly lean figure in khaki, staring at Frink. "I had a hard time getting rid of the stuff. They're all scared—and with reason. The game's up, Frink. We're spotted."

Frink was calm.

"By whom? The British?"

"The Americans. That lousy twenty-dollar bill—"

A gold tooth flashed as Frink smiled incredulously.

"I don't believe it," he said.

Waldo insisted.

"Do you believe there's a Sikh constable sitting out in front?"

Frink sat down. He was bare above the waist, and two rolls of fat protruded over the top of his duck trousers. His small eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"British North Borneo is a private country," he said, as if talking to himself. "As long as the government pays dividends to the stockholders, tax payers aren't bothered for much short of murder. We haven't committed any offense against the North Borneo Company. Why should the Sikh constable be interested in us?"

"Wait a minute," said Waldo. He went into the next room and ostentatiously told the Chinese clerk to go home

for the day. Then he came back and closed the door carefully. "Listen," he continued. "American territorial waters begin about fifty miles from where we're sitting. It stands to reason that the resident would be glad to keep an eye on a couple of counterfeiters just to please a friendly power, until the agents of the friendly power got ready to act. Well, it happens that said agents will be ready to act at sundown tonight . . ."

Frink ran his hand over his closely clipped hair. A bristly blond pompadour sprang back into place as his plump fingers passed.

"How do you know?" he demanded indifferently.

"Listen, Frink." Waldo was shaking a long finger for emphasis. "There was at least one agent on the *Lombok* with me. I heard in Zambo he was coming down. They told me how he was going to work. Extradition is too slow, or impossible, or something. So, as soon as the gent in question locates enough evidence to make things sure, he's going to open fire and wipe us out."

WALDO paused. He noted that Frink had stopped rubbing his head and was staring back, still outwardly calm; but from the way Frink's lips were pressed together, Waldo could tell that his story was taking effect.

"Well," drawled Frink with exaggerated deliberation, "what are we going to do about it?"

"We're going to liquidate," said Waldo. "We're going right now to get our undivided profits. Then we're going to plant a wad of bad money and the plates on some innocent soul and put him on the *Lombok*, sailing for Singapore at ten tonight. The ship will be watched. And while the big guns pounce on our plant, we'll be climbing into the skiff in back of the shack, and make for the Saigon rice steamer which clears at ten-thirty."

"Who will be the plant?"

"Why, I was thinking of that halfcaste engraver of ours."

The gold tooth flashed again as Frink smiled.

"The halfcaste's gone," he said.

"Gone? Where to?"

"While you were away we had a little argument so I—paid him off."

"Then he's the bird who started the big guns after us. Revenge . . ."

Frink shook his head slowly.

"No," he said slowly. "I'm certain he didn't sell us out to the big guns—or anybody else."

Frink grinned again—a man greatly satisfied with himself.

"Come on, get some clothes on." Waldo seized him by the arm. "We'll go over and get the capital from the notary. Then we'll dig up a boob later. Maybe our four-eyed Chinese clerk."

In twenty minutes the two men were back, perspiring, with the newspaper wrapped packets of genuine currency.

Frink unwrapped the bills, and Waldo casually verified that there were three stacks of ten thousand dollars each.

"Thirty thousand," he said. "And now for the petty cash. How much is there in the safe in the back room?"

Frink hesitated. His eyes were closed. He seemed to be calculating.

"About two thousand," he said, without opening his eyes.

"What the thundering hell?" boomed Waldo, advancing his face close to Frink's. Frink opened his eyes. "You're trying to hold out, damn you! Why, there was more than that when I left."

"Now, now, now, Waldo," began Frink calmly. "There's been expenses."

"Expenses!" Waldo emitted a mirthless laugh that echoed sarcastically. "Expenses! Our overhead's been practically nothing for months. You haven't bought a thing for the office except liquor, and those two bogus jade Buddhas on your desk. Don't think you can swindle me out of a couple of thousand on the strength of two glass statues that ain't worth a dollar the pair!"

"No, of course not," murmured Frink. "I was thinking of several outstanding bills. But if we really have to leave in a hurry—"

"Look here, Frink!"

Waldo moved nearer, menacing, breathing noisily through his nose. He didn't want to lose his temper; his plan didn't call for it. But something was making him threaten Frink, something akin to the feeling that had made him decide on murder that morning. The furrows that cut the two sides of his narrow face seemed to sink deeper. His eyes blazed from beneath dark, heavy lids. He wanted to choke Frink. He would!

"Damn it, Frink! I've had enough of your trying to put it over me!"

He stretched a bony hand toward Frink's fat throat. Frink arose suddenly, retreated a step, made a quick movement as if to open a drawer in the table, changed his mind and laid a gently restraining hand on Waldo's chest.

"Now, now, now, Waldo. We aren't going to kill each other for the sake of a few miserable dollars, are we?"

"Are we?" repeated Waldo.

"We'd be foolish," said Frink. "There's plenty for both. Thirty thousand here, and there must be five thousand in the safe."

"Five sounds better," said Waldo. Civilization was reasserting itself. He had no longer an impulse to choke Frink. He would take the money decently—and cleverly. "Let's count it," he added.

He sat down and watched Frink close the blinds, slide back a panel in the wall. The opening revealed a small safe. Frink twirled the combination dial and swung back the steel door. The inside of the safe was stacked with reams of counterfeit money, which almost buried a black metal box. Frink took the box, carried it to the table, and dumped the contents in front of Waldo—a stack of green-backed bills. It was a policy of the firm to change all profits into American currency of the same denomination as the home made money—twenty-dollar notes. The presence of genuine American money in large quantities would give an air of authenticity to their own product, to say nothing of being easily negotiable in an emergency.

"Count it yourself," said Frink.

WALDO gathered up the currency in handfuls. The feel of the crisp notes gave him a voluptuous thrill. His lean fingers worked nimbly to straighten the edges and tap the bills into neat packets. He began to count them into stacks of one thousand.

He frowned to conceal his elation. Sixty, eighty, nine hundred . . . Here he had the whole works in front of him . . . Sixty, eighty, two thousand . . . It probably wouldn't be much of a trick to spring up and overpower Frink, now, and make off with the pile . . . Sixty, eighty, five hundred . . . Still, he'd better stick to his plan . . . He looked up. He stopped counting. His heart skipped a beat.

He was staring into the muzzle of an automatic steady in the hands of Frink. He did not raise his eyes to the level of Frink's. He continued to stare at the gun. Both his hands were on the table . . . Useless to reach for his gun. No time. He caught his breath, then went on counting. Forty, sixty, eighty, hundred. Twenty, forty . . .

"Why the fireworks?" he said, without looking up. "Are we celebrating Empire Day, or Fourth of July, or something?"

Frink didn't reply. Waldo went on counting. Twenty, forty, sixty . . . His hand was steady, but he was perspiring profusely. The heat, he told himself. Damned hot. A drop of perspiration splashed on his hand . . Twenty, forty—

"Say, Frink," he said suddenly. "It wouldn't be good policy to go shooting off guns with the majesty of the law camped at your front door."

"I don't want to shoot you," Frink replied phlegmatically. "I'm just protecting myself. You've had a funny look in your eyes ever since you got in today. You look as though you might be hatching one of your ruddy brain children—and I want this here liquidation to be strictly on the square." He made a gesture with the gun.

"So do I," said Waldo. He went on counting in silence.

"Five thousand and a few-odd," he announced at last. "With the capital stake, that makes thirty-five thousand, to which I add the measly thousand I just picked up in the Philippines. Thirty-six grand in all. Eighteen apiece. Correct?"

"Yes," said Frink. "Shall we split it now?"

Waldo moistened his lips. Frink still held the automatic.

"You haven't told me yet whether you're going to skip with me tonight," said Waldo. "But whether you go or not, I'm clearing out. And I suggest you put the cash back into the safe and make the division just before I—or we—leave."

"Suit yourself." Frink gathered up the money with one hand and stuffed it into the black box. "Do you mind if I put it in the safe myself?"

"I wish you would," said Waldo, eyeing every movement.

Frink put the box under one arm, opened a drawer in the table and took out a clip of cartridges. In the open drawer, Waldo caught sight of a snake bladed *kris*.

With his knee, Frink pushed the drawer shut.

"The gun wasn't loaded," he said casually, pushing the clip into the automatic, "but it is now."

Before Waldo could comment, a knock sounded at the street door.

Waldo stood up. He directed a suspicious glance at Frink.

"That's probably your friend," said Frink. "I forgot to tell you that a man came asking for you this morning. I told him to come back later."

"I haven't any friends," said Waldo.

"This chap said he's known you for years. Name's Zander or Cander, or something. That's probably him outside now."

Waldo's heavy eyelids lifted.

"Softy Cander?"

He leaned against the edge of the table. The wings of an idea were again fluttering in his brain. Softy Cander! He couldn't have come at a more opportune time. There was perhaps some justice in the universe after all . . . The knock was repeated. It was a timid, hesitant knock; Cander, undoubtedly.

"Listen," said Waldo, speaking rapidly. "If that's Cander, he's a godsend. He's the very man to take the rap for us. We'll load him up with bad money and the plates, and let him get arrested or shot while we sneak out on the Saigon rice boat."

"Are you sure this Cander chap isn't a detective?"

"Cander? He's the stupidest and most unsuccessful bird that ever did time in Bilibid. He isn't even a full fledged crook. He's soft."

Frink put the money in the safe, twirled the combination, and slid the concealing panel into place.

"Let him in," he said.

Waldo walked through to the front room and opened the door.

The man who sauntered in was small and thin, wearing a rumpled suit of white drill that seemed a trifle too large. He took off a shapeless, sweat stained straw hat, revealing a head of sparse, reddish hair in disarray.

"'Lo, Waldo," he said in a treble drawl.

"Howdy, Cander."

Cander offered a limp, furtive handclasp.

"Oh, I'm always about the same," he said.

Cander was looking about him with pale gray eyes that were too large for his small, pinched face. There was something pathetic about that face. An expression of vague eagerness in the eyes seemed to be reaching hopefully after some idea that was eternally elusive. A slight twist to his thin, colorless lips gave the impression that he was ashamed of something, but had forgotten just exactly what it was.

"Sit down, Cander," said Waldo. "When did you get out?"

"OH, I BEEN out for six months," said Cander. "I been down around Bangkok and Saigon way. I was doing pretty good, too, but the guy I was working with skipped with all our jack. Things like that is always happening to me, but I don't care, really. If a guy needs it more than me, he's always welcome to it. I can always get some more some place else. And I always give a friend a hand. Remember that time in Cebu, the last time I seen you, Waldo?"

"I certainly do," said Waldo. He tried to inject a note of heartfelt gratitude into his voice, but his whole manner remained cold and fish-like. "You mean those hundred pesos you lent me? They saved my life. I was flat broke and I had to get out of town in a hurry. Geez, Cander, I'm glad you turned up here. I've always wanted to run across you so I could pay you back."

"Oh, I didn't come for that," protested Cander sheepishly. "I knowed you was here, though. A bird in Saigon, a kind of a chink money changer, he told me you had a green goods game over here in Sandakan and was doing pretty good, too."

"Have a spot of cough medicine?" Waldo held out a bottle.

"Thanks, don't care if I do. Gosh, that's plenty, thanks . . . So, having nothing much to do, I thought I'd run over here and see how you was. I got a friend—he's mate in that Saigon rice ship out yonder. He brought me over deadhead . . ." Softy Cander's eyes wandered about the room, pausing at a large desk on which was a brass sign, "Henry Frink, Manager", flanked by two green glass Buddhas. "Say, those is damn nice statues you got there," he resumed. "Damn pretty statues. And all made outa jade, too . . ."

"Finest jade there is. Worth plenty!" interrupted Henry Frink, who until this moment had been silently observing Cander.

"I bet," agreed Softy Cander. "They're pretty. You two must be doing pretty good, all right."

"Not bad," said Waldo. "I'm glad to say we're in a position so I can pay you back that little debt I owe you—with interest. Heavy interest. Cander, I'm going to put you next to a good thing. How would you like to work with us in the big money?"

If Softy Cander was overjoyed at the opportunity, he made no great demonstration of his feelings.

"All right," he said without enthusiasm. "What's the gag?"

"Where were you figuring on heading from here?"

"Oh, I thought I'd go on down to Singapore, if I could wangle it somehow. There's guys in Singapore that owes me money."

"Fine!" exclaimed Waldo. "We'll stake you to your trip to Singapore. You leave tonight on the *Lombok*. We'll load you up with a thick wad of our highest quality, guaranteed-to-wear bank notes—kiddies cry for 'em. We'll give you Singapore addresses—but I guess you know where to go with the stuff. Half of everything you can get for the lot is yours. You won't have any trouble at all knocking out five or ten grand."

"Thanks," said Cander absently. "When do I get the samples?"

"Tonight," said Waldo. "Just before you go aboard the *Lombok*. She sails at ten. Suppose you pick up the stuff about nine-thirty?"

"Why can't I take it now?"

"We don't want our money around Sandakan," said Waldo quickly. "We've always been careful that none of it's ever seen where it's made."

"O. K.," said Cander. "I'll come back then. You fellas sleep here, do you?"

"We'll extend our office hours until you come," said Frink.

"But we sleep in our palatial villa up on the hill where Frink can kid himself there's a breath of air," amended Waldo.

"O. K.," said Cander, putting on his hat. "Well, I'll be seein' you later, then. I got a date with my friend, the mate of the rice steamer. He's going back to Saigon tonight. I was going with him, so

I'll have to tell him I got new plans."

"Where'll you be?" inquired Waldo. "In case we want to see you to arrange for your ticket and what not?"

"I'll be at that big chink grog shop near the dock—the first one on the right," replied Cander. "And by the way; I wonder—say, would it be asking too much for you to give me a small advance on expense money? So as I could stand a few rounds for my friend the mate—sort of to pay him back for my passage, like?"

Waldo smiled and tossed two crumpled Borneo bills across the table.

Frink arose and opened the door for Cander, who stammered thanks as he walked into the dusty glare of the hot street.

THROUGH the open door Waldo could see the red turbaned Sikh still sitting across the way. He saw that Frink was also looking at the Sikh, and he smiled to himself when he saw that Frink was frowning.

Frink closed the door, stripped off his jacket and sat down.

"Well?" he offered.

"Quite well," said Waldo. "Everything is shaping up fine."

"I don't know," countered Frink. "Your friend Cander may be simple minded—"

"He's not that bright," interrupted Waldo.

"He may be simple minded," continued Frink deliberately, "but there's something about him I don't like. I can't tell you what it is; something underneath, something tricky. I don't think he's an honest crook."

"Don't worry." Waldo laughed. "Softy Cander's so dumb that you can't really call him a crook at all. He's not trained right. He's just the boss bungler of the Far East. He used to be stoker on some ship that went off and left him stranded in Shanghai. And he still works for a living now and then, when he's not in jail. He never gets sent up for anything worthwhile, either. Just silly little things. In Hongkong he got it for making off with a dozen brass incense burners, shaped like elephants. He says he took them because he thought they were pretty, and he liked to stand 'em in a row and look at the way they were all different sizes—little ones on both ends, and the two big ones in the middle. And you know what he did to get thrown in Bilibid? He broke into a bank in Manila. They caught him coming out. You know what with? No, not money. Not Softy Cander. He probably never thought about there being money in the bank. They caught him coming out with a big Jap vase with gold chrysanthemums on it. He saw it on the president's desk and wanted it—probably to give to some *mestiza* gal. He never stole anything useful, like money, in all his life. Cander's our meat, all right. It's almost a shame to take advantage of him, he's that easy."

"Yes, maybe," said Frink, scratching his head, "but—"

He paused. He was thinking, and the effort contorted his flabby face.

"But why do we have to plant the stuff on anybody?" he demanded at last. "Why do we have to ring in a third party on this business? Why can't we just sink all the evidence in the bay and clear out?"

Waldo anticipated this question. He was surprised Frink hadn't asked it before. It was the only weak spot in the scheme, yet it was essential. He thought he could talk Frink out of his objections.

"My God, Frink, you're as dumb as Cander!" Waldo exclaimed. "How many times do I have to tell you that these insular officers are out for blood. They got us spotted; you can see that by the Sikh constable they got out there watching us. God knows where the big boys are ambushed, but you can bet your sweet life that they're just waiting for us to make a break so they can shoot us full of holes. That's why we've got to attract attention to somebody else, so we can make our getaway. If you want to take a chance

on your own hide, why, naturally, that's your own business."

Frink grunted, as though reluctantly convinced.

"Of course," Waldo went on, "we'll have to do a little work on the proposition this afternoon. We'll have to let it be known that Softy Cander is going to smuggle out counterfeit American bills, plates and all. We'll have to let it be known that he's going out on the *Lombok*. But that's easy. One of us can take him around to Crosfield's to get his ticket—and be obvious as hell about it. We can take him around to a couple of bars and drop hints a yard wide in the right places. I can go down and meet him in the chink grog shop—"

"You can," interrupted Frink, "but you won't. You don't think I'd stand by and let you and your imbecile friend get together and frame against me, do you? If this scheme of yours is on the level, you'll let me make all the arrangements."

Waldo shrugged his angular shoulders.

"I'm surprised," he said, "that you'd as much as think of trusting me alone in the same house as all this good money of ours."

"I wouldn't," Frink explained, "if it wasn't for the fact that I'll be gone only an hour, and most of that time I'll be in sight of this shack. You can't do anything in the interval that I can't undo. You can't get away from here without my knowing it in time."

"I'm satisfied," said Waldo, stretching himself. "As long as the split is on the square and we make our getaway all right. Go ahead and prime Softy for the killing. I'll see that our skiff is in good escaping condition."

THE DAY simmered to a close. The expanse of Sandakan Bay turned to blood in the glow of a scarlet sunset that stamped the rugged promontories in sharp black. Hump backed bullocks drew the day's last loads in thatch covered carts through the streets of Sandakan. Chinese women returned barefooted from the fields. Chinese merchants moved from their shops to the nearest opium joint. The crew of a Malay schooner just off shore bowed in unison toward Mecca. Young European foresters and shipping agents and assistant administrators hurried into clean whites for a little gin and gossip at the club. Two British planters drove in from an adjacent rubber estate, hilarious in a noisy flivver. The Sikh constable across from the offices of Borneo Manufactures, Limited, stood up, stretched, then sat down again. Henry Frink, coming up the street, paused a moment to regard the Sikh, then entered the shack to find Waldo asleep on the cot in the back room.

Foreigners all—Chinese and European, Malay and Indian, coolie and trader, administrator and counterfeiter, each clinging to his own civilization in his scramble for wealth; each considering himself superior to the aborigine who shunned the uncomfortable outposts the strangers had built, who preferred his jungle, where men killed each other decently in the old, primitive ways, to the coast town where men died of drink or boredom and fought with lies and slander instead of with spears and arrows . . .

As he opened his eyes and beheld the plump silhouette of Frink in the doorway, Tony Waldo felt the jungle very, very close. For the third time that day he wanted to be done with civilized subterfuge, to wait until Frink came nearer, then to spring at his throat and be done with it. Suddenly he sat up and shook himself. Reason. He had brains, didn't he? A clever crook never had to kill. His plan was working out. He would have everything, and there would be no bloodshed . . .

He mumbled a greeting to Frink, stood up, yawned, and opened the waterside door of the rear room. He glanced up at the dismal masses of cloud rolling through the purple gloom before the hot, damp wind that whipped across from the unseen opposite shore of Sandakan Bay. He caught a glimpse of the riding lights of the Saigon rice steamer, anchored a scant

hundred yards off shore. Then he closed the door and turned to Frink.

"Everything fixed?"

Frink nodded.

"Your imbecile friend was docile enough. Everybody knows he's going out on the *Lombok*. He'll be by at nine-thirty for the green goods. And his ticket to Singapore. I'm holding that out so he'll be sure to come."

"He'll come; depend on Softy."

"The rice boat sails at ten-thirty; I suppose you know that?"

"Yes."

"And that Sikh constable is still across the street, waiting. I suppose you know that, too."

Frink stared at Waldo with peculiar insistence. Waldo didn't answer. He had nothing more to say—not a word during the meal that Frink ordered sent in. He hardly touched the food. Frink ate heartily; Waldo drank constantly. Frink drank nothing.

While Waldo was fishing an insect out of his glass, rain began roaring down on the roof with tropical suddenness, dinning in his ears, drumming on his taut nerves. Fine drops of water began to trickle through a leak in the roof, wetting the table. Waldo swore, moved into the back room and sat on the cot, mopping his brow.

In the back room he was annoyed by the slapping of waves against the piles. He returned to the front room. For twenty minutes he walked the floor. Frink sat complacently and watched him. Both men seemed to be waiting suspiciously . . .

At nine o'clock Frink said—

"Shall we make the split now?"

Waldo stopped pacing.

"Let's wait until we get Softy Cander off our hands," he said. "Do you mind?"

"I don't care when we split, as long as it's square," said Frink.

Waldo said nothing. He sat down opposite Frink, put his elbows on the table and rested his pointed chin in the palms of his two hands. He stared at Frink's impassive, round face, waiting.

The roar of the rain rose in pitch, drowning the muted sound of the waves under the rear of the house. Thunder exploded and muttered ominously in the distance. A vehicle splashed by outside. Frink began drumming on the table with his fat fingers, still gazing at Waldo.

Waldo arose suddenly and started to pace the floor again. He looked at his watch—nine-thirty. He walked into the next room, stopped in front of a mirror, and wiped away part of the cloud humidity had laid upon the glass. He wanted to see if his nervousness showed in his face. In the mirror he saw a reflection of Frink, standing in the doorway, watching him again. He faced abruptly about.

"Say, is Softy Cander going to show up or not?" he demanded. "What did you frame with him this afternoon?"

Frink made a vague, fat gesture. His gold tooth gleamed in the center of an enigmatical smile.

"You ought to know," he said. "He's your friend."

Again silence—a silence heavy with sticky heat and the tattoo of the rain.

A knock sounded on the street door.

Waldo started forward nervously, then caught himself. What was the matter with him? Why the fidgets? Certainly the slow witted Frink wasn't a man to plot surprises. As long as Frink thought he was going to get his share of the thirty-six thousand, everything would go along all right. Waldo walked slowly toward the door. Frink let him go, watching.

CANDER came slinking in, his frayed whites clinging to his thin form, his straw hat dripping.

"Howdy, gents," he piped. "I'm a little late. I been seein' my sailor friend off to his ship. She leaves in an hour."

"The *Lombok* sails in twenty minutes," said Waldo. "You'll have to hump to make it."

"Oh, I'll make it all right," said Cander. "I'm all ready to go. Where's the bale of green goods?"

"Got anything to put it in?" asked Waldo.

"I never carry no baggage," Cander answered. "Can't you wrap 'em in a paper or something?"

Frink turned to Waldo.

"Go get the fancy stocks," he said. "I'll find some baggage for Mister Cander."

A moment later, when Waldo returned from the back room with an armful of oblong bundles, Frink was wiping the mold from a small black bag. Frink snapped the bag open.

"Let's see!"

Frink snatched a packet of bills from Waldo and flipped back the corners of three or four bills on top. Waldo watched him with a peculiar tightening of his lips. Frink turned the packet over and repeated his examination of the bottom bills. He tossed the bundle into the bag.

"They're a first rate article," said Frink to Cander. "You won't have any trouble getting rid of them."

He continued to look closely at the bundles of bills as he took them from Waldo to drop them into the bag.

"There's about thirty grand face value there," said Waldo. "Don't take less than thirty dollars a hundred. I guess you'll know how to get it through the customs?"

"Sure," said the dripping Cander. "I'll manage. Well, I'd better dash for the dock. I'll just get aboard."

"Hurry," said Waldo.

"Here's your ticket," said Frink.

"I sure am much obliged to you fellas for lettin' me in on this," said Cander, extending one wet hand and grasping the bag with the other.

"Come back for more when those are gone," said Waldo.

"I'll be back," replied Cander. He opened the door and disappeared.

The open door cast a luminous oblong into the night, gilding the glistening streaks of rain. For an instant the light revealed a bearded, turbaned figure crouched in the doorway opposite. Then the door closed. A salvo of thunder crashed and echoed.

"He's got fifteen minutes," said Frink. "He'll get there in time to put his foot in it."

"The Sikh's still outside," said Waldo. "Let's douse the light. We can use a flash lamp out back."

He acted before Frink had a chance to reply.

Immediately darkness wiped out the room, and Waldo regretted his action. It was an unreasoning regret, provoked by a strange feeling that the dark was closing in about him, smothering him. He put out a hand to ward off the strangling force with which the darkness seemed impregnated. Then he dropped his arm. He would have to control his nerves better than that. There was no reason for panic. Everything was going on schedule . . . He listened. He sensed Frink standing a few feet away, where he had been when the light was extinguished. He heard the roar of the rain. Then he heard another noise, a wild flapping, a bat battering itself frantically against the ceiling.

It was only five seconds that Waldo stood there in the dark, yet in that instant the jungle had again intruded.

"Ready to split, Waldo?"

Frink speaking. Frink's voice didn't come from the exact quarter that Waldo had imagined. Frink must have moved.

"Just a minute," replied Waldo. "First I want to go out and have a look at the skiff. I thought I heard it banging against the piles. It might be swamped. I'll make sure it's all right and come right back."

He walked into the back room, groping. He paused. He thought he heard Frink following him. He took another two steps, felt for the wall. There was no time to lose, now. He had to get out in a hurry. There was a long run in the rain ahead of him. He turned up his coat collar. Then he put out his hand for the knob of the back door that opened on the runway.

He did not open the door.

Before his fingers touched the knob, he felt a sharp blade bite into his back, grate against his scapula and glance off, tearing his flesh.

He whirled to grapple his assailant.

His fingers closed on the uneven edge of a blade—Frink's *kris*.

The *kris* pulled through his grasp, slashing his left hand.

He reached for his gun, whipped it out.

The Malay knife swished through the darkness and caught him on the right wrist.

The gun clattered to the floor.

He caught hold of a fat arm, but it was the wrong arm. Frink's knife arm was still free. Again the *kris* descended, gashing deep into Waldo's neck just above the junction with the shoulder. A sickening wave of pain and weakness passed over him. He was aware of blood drenching him.

Reeling, he grabbed again, this time getting both aching hands on the hilt of the *kris* as it drove toward him. He held it off.

Fighting desperately, struggling and twisting blindly, he forced the point of the weapon downward, kept it harmlessly flat by half falling, half lunging against Frink. As he launched forward, his foot grazed some object that slid along the floor. His gun?

He had touched it for a moment and it was gone. Clinging to the *kris* hilt, he was pulled away. He dragged one foot, feeling about the floor, searching. No use . . .

Panting, Frink yanked, pushed, wrenched. He kicked Waldo in the shins, spun him half around, jerked him back. Waldo staggered, hanging on. Again his foot touched something—under his instep. His gun? It must be.

He released his hold on the *kris* hilt, dropped to his knees. His hands groped, fumbled, found the gun.

He felt Frink bump against him, nearly upsetting him. He grasped the gun with throbbing fingers. As he straightened up, the slashing blade again cut into his chest. He squeezed the trigger.

THE GUN roared for a flaming instant—an explosion blending with the booming din of the thunder storm.

Waldo heard Frink stumble, then thump to the floor. There was a groan.

Waldo took a step and fell limply against the wall, smiling. He put one hand to his neck, aware that his life was slowly flowing from his wound there. He steadied himself against the wall and slid weakly to the floor. His gun hung from one finger by the trigger guard.

"Frink, you damned skunk!" he called. "I thought we weren't going to kill each other—over a few miserable dollars."

No answer.

"Frink, you've killed me, and I hope I got you too, you back stabbing yegg."

Still no answer. There was the sound of agonized breathing, and that of a man dragging himself across the floor. Then the noise of a panel sliding back, and the whirr of a metal dial . . . Frink, wounded, trying to open the safe!

Waldo let his benumbed head fall back against the wall, opened his mouth, and uttered a long, loud, hollow laugh that filled the darkness with ironic, mocking echoes.

"Frink, you damned, square headed roach! Frink after the money—Frink killed his partner so he could hog the works! But there ain't any money, you yellow dog! The safe's empty, you ruddy ass!"

At last Frink spoke. Between gasps he poured forth a stream of obscene invective and blasphemous vituperation.

"The cash is gone," Waldo resumed, gloating. "Cander's got it! I gave it to him—the whole thirty-six thousand, sandwiched in between bunches of the bad money. I stacked the packets while you were gone this afternoon!" Again Waldo laughed, but less loudly. "And Softy Cander doesn't know he's got it. I was going to sneak after him—I was on my way when you knifed me. I was going to follow Softy on the boat, tap him gently on the cranium, and take the money away—all for myself, Frink!"

Again Frink swore, not loudly, for he seemed to be growing weaker, but effectively and picturesquely. After several oaths, he finally managed to say:

"And your damned agents? And your—great raid?"

"No agents," said Waldo, "at least not until next week. And there's no raid. That was my story to panic you into my scheme. Even the Sikh outside—I hired him. I paid him ten dollars to stay there until ten tonight. It must be ten now, you brainless idiot!"

Waldo coughed. It seemed as if he were coughing out the last spark of life, but his senses still functioned. He was able to hear the hoarse blast of a steamer whistle.

"There goes the *Lombok*," he murmured.

"With Cander on board," railed Frink shrilly. "The bungler, the simple minded, the dumbest bird in the Far East—with our good money . . ." Frink made a strange noise in his throat. "God, that's clever. That's great—that's—"

Waldo tried to laugh, but the effort was too great. He gurgled slightly.

"Frink!" he called weakly.

There was no answer, not even a groan. Fear penetrated the mist gathering in the mind of Waldo. Suppose Frink were not mortally hurt? That would never do. He would have to finish him. Yet shooting across the room in the dark was impossible. Summoning his last degree of energy, he grasped his gun, struggled to his knees and began crawling. He stumbled against Frink's body and sprawled across the legs. A great, overpowering weariness descended upon him. He did not get up again.

The rain roared on the roof.

Across the way, the Sikh constable arose, shook himself, and walked down the street.

From the other direction came a frail little man with dripping clothes that were too large for him. He was carrying a black bag.

He walked down the runway at the side of the house and peered into the windows. He could not see the two bodies lying below the open safe in the back room. He listened. Hearing nothing, he went quickly to the front door and fitted a pass key from a large bunch. He opened the door, started as a bat flew out, then peered in, was reassured and entered.

He stood in the dark for a moment, listening. Then he placed the bag on the large desk in the center of the front room, opened it, and began tossing out packages of counterfeit banknotes in which were sandwiched some thirty-six thousand dollars in bonafide currency. He dropped the packages to the floor carelessly, even with an occasional gesture of good riddance. He was mumbling to himself something about counterfeit money so terrible that even a blind man wouldn't take it.

Then he picked up two Buddhas of green glass from the desk, chuckled as he passed his hands caressingly over them, and put them into the empty bag. He went out and locked the door behind him.

At the landing stage back of the house he found a skiff. He got in, carefully placed his bag on the seat before him, and started rowing for the lights of the rice steamer that was preparing to sail for Saigon.

PALM OIL RUFFIAN

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

WHEN a white clad man put his sun helmet down on my desk the other day and held out his hand my thoughts suddenly went back a few years to West Africa.

He was a palm oil ruffian, a trader on the coast which has seen more adventure, freebooting and fighting than almost any other coast in the world. Our last meeting had been in a surf boat racing dangerously toward a steep beach with ten mad paddlers shouting a chorus that was drowned by a breaking wave. He had taken a steamer south to South Africa to see new African territory before returning home. Not that he had been unhappy in his exile; for he has one of the very few jobs in West Africa worth having. He is an old hand there. He knew the ill fated Roger Casement and he remembers Edgar Wallace hurrying through Matadi to investigate the rubber atrocities that Casement, among others, revealed.

No, this red faced man in the white suit did not look as if he had just emerged from the "White Man's Grave". His headquarters are at Port Gentil—on the very lagoon where old Trader Horn's adventures began—a healthy sandspit cooled by clean sea breezes. He had not been down with malaria for five years.

Behind Port Gentil, stretching along the coasts of French and Spanish Equatorial Africa, are the timber forests that send huge balks of mahogany to Hamburg and Bordeaux. The collapse of the Russian timber trade under the Soviet has made men in this part of Africa rich; and my friend has shared in this prosperity.

His firm is very respectable today—though not so many years ago, like other great Liverpool trading concerns, they were dealing in black ivory. Now there are kernels and cocoa, palm oil and ground nuts. The elephants of the forests are nearly all rogues, yielding little ivory; but the giant gorillas are valuable to scientists and cinema men.

Black clerks, elegant negroes who speak stilted English and write astonishing letters, do all the routine work at my friend's trading stations. Useful enough under strict supervision, alone they would allow the business to go to pieces in a week. They cheat the simple minded natives in small ways, and so retire to Sierra Leone, their paradise, to spend a comfortable middle age.

So the trader is now going home quite gladly.

Yet, after a month or two in England, his thoughts will turn to moonlight nights off tropic shores, the boat lifting easily under sail, bound for little ports and scented islands where there is trade—and romance.

Those are the memories that call a man back to West Africa.

WEST OF 96

By EMMETT DALTON

(*Last of the Dalton Boys,*
Famous Western Outlaws)

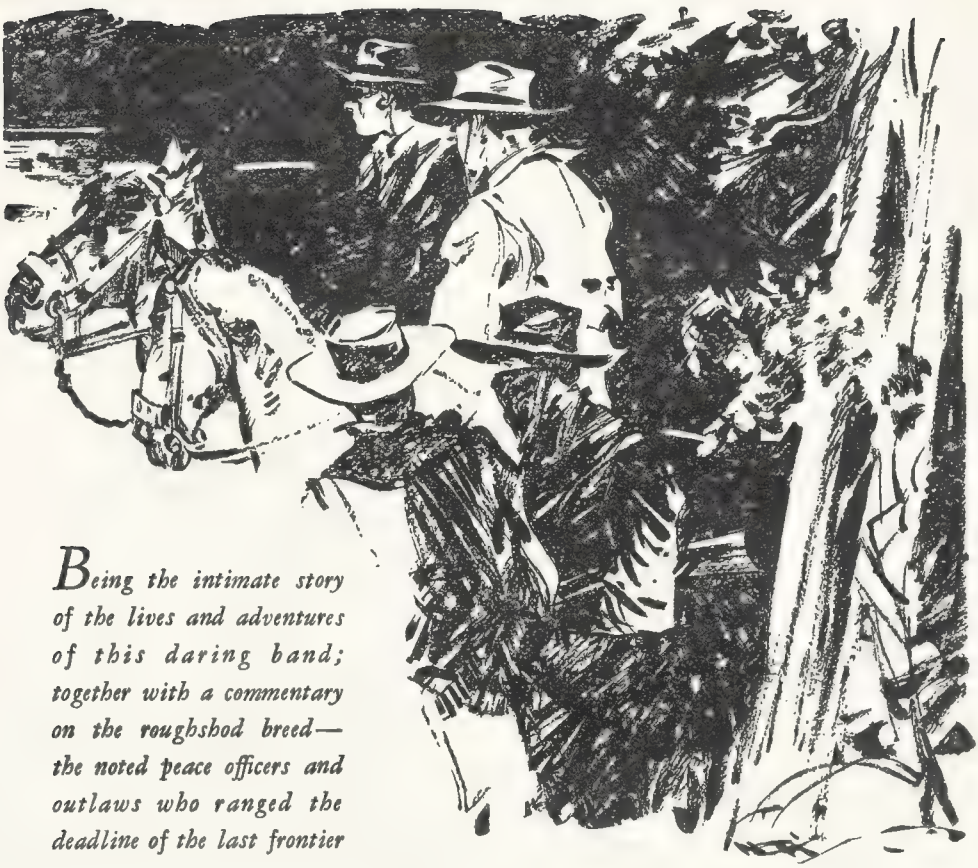
IN COLLABORATION WITH
JACK JUNGMEYER

THERE is a strong tendency to do the thing of which one is accused. The Alila express holdup, of which we knew nothing, plunged us into outlawry. Suspected, hunted, pursued by posses, the Dalton boys were forced into hiding. In youthful retaliation—against the express companies, against the law which we had served as deputies, against society—we staged the Whorton train robbery. Charley Bryant was killed; it was our baptism in outlawry.

Grat Dalton was trapped and held in prison in California. Bob Dalton assumed the leadership of the band. We did not know that Grat had sawed his way out of jail and was riding over the mountains to rejoin us. If we had known, perhaps we would have disbanded after Whorton. But ill gotten money goes fast, and we wanted funds with which to rescue Grat from the law. Pressure drove us to our second train robbery—the lane that had no turning.

Eugenia Moore, Bob's sweetheart, in the guise of a magazine writer gathering material on Oklahoma, interviewed railroad officials and spotted the most likely point for us to strike a rich haul of gold shipments. It was at Lelietta, on the M. K. & T.

At dusk we rode along the right of way, watching the depot semaphore to see if the Express was to be signaled to a stop by the station agent. Then four sharp blasts, as the locomotive thundered into sight. The engineer was asking the question too. The semaphore swung. The ruby stop light glowed. The brakes squealed . . .



Being the intimate story of the lives and adventures of this daring band; together with a commentary on the roughshod breed—the noted peace officers and outlaws who ranged the deadline of the last frontier

BOB and Doolin, who were to mount the cab, hastened forward. As the engineer was about to pull the throttle the two vaulted up and covered the locomotive crew. Immediately the rest of us went into action. An intimidating volley from our guns announced what was up. The station agent discreetly slipped out of range, and the crew made no resistance. It was not until Powers had made a bluffing threat of using dynamite (which, incidentally, the Daltons at no time employed) and had fired a couple of hurry-up shots beside the express door, that the messenger finally opened the door. By this time Bob and Doolin had forced the engine crew around to the express car.

As the door slid open the messenger threw his hands up while Doolin covered him with his rifle. Bob vaulted in and shortly the messenger appeared with a meal sack so heavy that he staggered under its bulk. Bob ordered him to jump out and lay the sack on the platform. It was half filled with silver dollars.

Meanwhile a number of passengers, bolder than the usual run of travelers, had stepped out down along the line of coaches. They were beginning to act threateningly. To break up any dangerous concert Bob yelled at them to get back inside. But some of them even withstood the brandishment of weapons. One heavy fellow had the rash courage to flourish a small caliber pistol. Bill Doolin let out a roar of rage.

"They make me tired," he bellowed. "Watch me chase 'em!"

"You stick where you're ordered,"

commanded Bob, concerned for a clean getaway.

But this once Doolin rebelled, caught up in irresistible excitement. He let out a wild whoop and whirled straight back along the train, shooting in the air as he charged. Newcomb and I, Pierce and Broadwell came from our respective stations on each side of the train and joined Bob and Powers. Bob hustled the engine crew forward, commanded them to get under way and gave the engineer a final order.

"When you get down by the siding light yonder you slow down and have the firemen heave off a few shovels of coal. And don't be too stingy about it or you might run into some more trouble."

The drive wheels began to spin. The panic stricken passengers had piled into the coaches at Doolin's threatening charge. All except the reckless one who had brandished his pistol. He had missed the coach step in the scramble and had fallen sprawling. Now as the train began moving he crawled along on hands and knees reaching desperately for a hand hold. Finally he gained his feet and swung aboard the last coach. He stood shaking his fist at us as the lights of the Express dwindled down the track.

Doolin bellowed a contemptuous rejoinder. Nobody had received a scratch, unless you count the abrasions on the fat passenger's knees.

As we hauled away we saw the camper and his old woman gathering a sack of scattered coal up by the siding light.

At sunup camp next morning we gathered around to make the count and the divvy.

Each man's share amounted to about thirty-five hundred dollars. Measured against our various purposes it was far from adequate. The bird in hand is never quite so resplendent as the bird in the bush. Carefully conserved however, Bob's share and mine, if pooled, might give us a start with a little land and a few cattle in the Argentine. "The one grand haul" transpires so seldom as to be a devil's miracle.

AGAIN that lethargic lull after high action possessed us as we reached our sod house.

"Boys," announced Bob with unusual solemnity. "Emmett and I are through."

"If that's supposed to be a joke," croaked Doolin, "it ain't even funny!"

"I'm telling you," persisted Bob earnestly.

Immediately there was loud protest and cackles of mild derision. None of them would believe it. But finally they were compelled to consider the light of determination in Bob's gray eye.

"Through!" protested Powers. "What's eating you, Bob? Why, I haven't started yet!"

"I don't care whether you ever start or not," retorted Bob, a bit more testily. "You can't keep this up and get away with it. Sometime we're going to slip up."

"Hell," contributed Broadwell, "there's nothing like it! That bunch at Lelietta didn't have the nerve to fight a sick calf. What's all the bellyachin' about?"

"I don't care what you boys think," maintained Bob. "My mind's made up. I'm not talking about nerve. Nobody in this bunch is miscalculating any other fellow on that point. I'm talking plain horse sense. The chances are too many against us. I don't give a whoop in hell for all the deputies they're crowding on to our heels. And nobody's going to take Emmett and me alive to chuck behind any bars—let nobody make any mistake about that. But that ain't the point. The point is that we are not ready to cash in just yet.

"You boys have your wad. I helped you get it. And I don't care what you do with it. Us fellows have always understood each other, and there ain't going to be any misunderstanding now. But this is where Emmett and I call quits—and you can tie to that!"

For hours they argued, while we shaved our scraggly beards, ate supper and mended riding gear. If Bob and I saw only futility in the Lelietta affair, the

others were spurred on by the haul. The boys rasped at Bob, tried to cajole him, laughed, taunted and brought to bear all the bold arts of persuasion which daring, impetuous men possessed.

But Bob was adamant. Finally he fell completely silent.

I think of Bob's resolve that night in the stronghold—a determination not lightly made in face of the protest by his companions—as one of his most courageous decisions, even though it was eventually to relapse. He sensed most clearly then just what we were up against.

Almost overnight winter had come blustering down from the Northern Rockies.

A spit of snow was whipping about our ears as the gang departed the dugout to go its separate ways, drifting off through the night. Scarcely a word was said. Argument had been spent. The coin each man carried in his belt and saddle pockets was cold as lumps of ice. And every face was pinched to the hounding blast. Morning brought a weak sun and the parting.

"So long!" said Bob, briefly but amiably, as we halted a moment in a swale. "I'll let you boys hear from us later on. Good luck!"

Powers, Doolin, Broadwell, Pierce and Newcomb spoke their farewells in kind.

"Good luck!"

ON THE one hundred and seventh day of his record making flight from California Grat Dalton rode into the Oklahoma region where our mother lived. Man and horse were hard as nails. He was lean and weather burned. Some new wolf look blazed in his eyes.

Poor old Grat. A tempestuous boy who grew into an insatiable fighting man. Always a little puzzling to the rest of us. Aimless, discontented, troubled. Peculiarly alone, even though he was by nature decidedly social. Incalculable. Trying to justify and establish himself in pugnacious aggressions, yet finding little satisfaction even in successful battle.

Oklahoma was a vast green pasture when Grat joined us in the spring. His corrosive bitterness as he recited his experiences reinflamed our own clinkers of hatred.

Grat's predicament and his maledictions served to reunite the Dalton gang. He threw in his fortunes with us as a matter of course. He was ready and eager to step into the ill-fated boots they had taken off Charley Bryant at Hennessey. Henceforth we were Daltons together, one for all and all for one. Bob and I shed our good resolutions as the range creatures rubbed off their winter coats.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RED ROCK RAID

THE CHEYENNE country had just been opened to white settlement. It was one of those periodic concessions to the insatiably land hungry hordes which looked covetously upon the ever diminishing Indian lands of Oklahoma. Bob, Broadwell, Powers and I had staked preliminary claims along the South Canadian River, some time ahead of the "opening." We were "sooners." We had been holding down as long as possible certain choice sections of pasture land for Jim Riley in anticipation that he would legally acquire them in due time. We were determined, at least, that no other "sooners" should snatch the prize away. It was part payment of our debt of gratitude to Riley.

Summer was in the offing. The outlaw moon was rising. Gradually the old organization had reassembled. Red Rock, a little way station on the Santa Fé line in the Cherokee Strip, was our next objective. It was not far from our old hideout near Whorton. In addition to Bob, Grat and myself, Doolin, Broadwell, Newcomb, Pierce and Powers comprised the striking force. Again we were lusty in anticipation of the one grand haul.

Red Rock was then in the Otoe Indian Reservation, near where the famous 101

Ranch of Oklahoma now spreads. It boasted only a depot, section house, a store and a few sprawling residences.

The village lay wrapped in tranquil slumber. But it was in this innocuous hamlet that we narrowly escaped deadly ambuscade. The railroad, not the handful of inhabitants, had set the trap.

Confidently we had taken our appointed stations near the depot when the night train rolled in on regular schedule. We were on the verge of going into action.

"Hold on," I cautioned. "Something wrong here. Look at that smoker—it's dark!"

"You're right," said Bob. "The station agent is acting queer too."

Nervously peering into the dark, the agent had gone to the express car. There he conferred in obvious agitation with the messenger. So for a space we waited, tensely on guard, while the engine hissed idly. No traveler got on or off. The passenger coaches looked innocent enough; lights dimmed for the night; a few sleepy heads on the reclining chairs; everything apparently regular. But the lightless coach behind the express car. That black smoker—was deadly menace crouching there in readiness, waiting to spit flame at the first sign of trouble? All this it had taken us perhaps half a minute to observe and appraise.

While we waited, undecided, the train pulled out. And now suddenly some of the apparently sleepy passengers came awake and peered intently from the windows as the coaches slid past. Something expected hadn't transpired.

"I think we've been buffaloed," said Powers.

"Yeah," added Doolin, "standin' here like a bunch o' suckers while the money flits away!"

"Gold-bricked again!" Grat exploded as he watched the red tail light vanish down the track. Even I was now inclined to believe that we had let a prize slip away while we stood spellbound by some fantastic apprehension. But not Bob.

"I thought so," he said, facing about as a rumble grew in the north. A second section, the regular express as it proved, came roaring in. Almost it laid its searching headlights upon us before we leaped into the shadows.

"That's her," commented Bob. "She's all lit up. This is the one we want."

Doolin, Powers and Grat looked a bit sheepish. They had a moment's solemn reflection on what we might have stepped into with less caution. We learned later that the railway company had sent through a pilot deadhead loaded with guards. The black smoker had been a rolling ambush.

IT WAS a doubly surprised train crew which lifted its hands aloft when the genuine money train came to halt and we got into action.

The robbery was swiftly done, without resistance or injury. Not even a shot had been fired. Red Rock, save for the station agent, hadn't even turned over in its sleep. The proceeds were something short of eleven thousand dollars. The gathering storm enveloped us as we rode away.

Word of the Red Rock robbery was flashed to Purcell. From there a posse set out westward under command of U. S. Deputy Marshal John Swayne. A second posse raced from El Reno. Both forces beat the country along the South Canadian River to the Panhandle of Texas. For the first time now pursuit was actually on a hot trail. Meantime, we had been circling through herds of horses and cattle to kill our trail. Then splitting up into pairs, each taking a different route, we met next morning at a noted spring forty miles west of Red Rock and there split the spoils.

John Swayne's posse groped its way to within a few miles of our lair. Powers and Doolin had temporarily detoured from the rest of the band, heading for McKinney's ranch on the South Canadian. Powers and McKinney were old buddies. The outlaw had given McKin-

ney a claim which he had held down for the rancher until the day of filing.

Unknown to Powers and Doolin, Swayne's men had reached McKinney's place ahead of them. The boys almost walked into the marshal's outfit. Not ten minutes before the two outlaws came in to get fresh horses, without the least suspicion of danger, Swayne had been interrogating the rancher. Now the posse was perhaps less than a mile away, beating the brush up along a creek.

"You fellers better hit the breeze fast," warned the alarmed McKinney as Doolin and Powers appeared. "The marshals are thick as fleas around here. Must 'a' smelled you boys comin'."

Powers and Doolin, despite the imminent peril, stopped long enough for Powers to get a fresh horse which the rancher had been keeping for him. Then with the leisurely trot of arrogance they rode up along the creek and went into camp, some three miles from the house. For hours they were never more than a few miles away from the prowling hunters.

Swayne was rated a tough man. With him were Deputies Chris Madsen and Jim Cook and their possemen, six in all. That night Power's fresh horse broke loose and drifted back toward the ranch. Swayne saw the animal as it passed the officers' night camp. He caught it, observed the broken rope and noted the direction from which the horse had come.

Powers and Doolin rolled out of their saddle blankets, discovered that the horse was gone and at once set out to recover it. As they emerged from the creek bottom they ran spang into Swayne and his crowd. There was an instant of mutual surprise. Powers and Doolin beat the posse to the drop. Power's reckless fury rose as he noted the marshal astride his own horse.

"You get out of that saddle quick," he roared, "or you won't be ridin' any more!"

He held his rifle on Swayne while Doolin covered the others. Swayne dismounted, careful to keep his hands aloft. Powers emptied every gun of cartridges and took all the ammunition from the officers' belts.

"And now," ordered Powers, "you trouble hunters get out o' this country and stay out!"

Back in Purcell they gave out elaborate interviews about their bootless chase, but Swayne never mentioned a word about Powers taking the horse from under him.

Powers and Doolin rejoined us at Lee Moore's place, fifteen miles away on the North Canadian. At one moment, Powers said, he was minded to crack loose at Swayne. But even as his finger had tightened for the pull he had remembered Bob's insistent order, often expressed, that none of us were to use unnecessary violence in encounters with U. S. deputy marshals. Last shreds of a former loyalty, this standing order of Bob's, which saved more than one marshal's life.

Whorton, Lelietta, Red Rock; so ran the mounting tally against us. A few hours of tense action, then long weeks of sluggish inactivity. After each of these sorties the chase had grown hotter. Our days were running with a hastening pace.

We knew the terrible thrill of the hunted creature—an abysmal joy.

CHAPTER XIV

THE OUTLAW'S MOON

JULY. The outlaw's moon was rising. It gleamed upon the red rivers of the old Indian lands and beckoned through the portholes of our dugout. But black were the shadows it cast in the little prairie town of Woodward where Eugenia Moore watched its growth with troubled eyes, night by night, from the window of a friendly shelter. For Eugenia Moore and Bob Dalton this silver blaze in the sky was to be the last lover's moon, and she seemed to have some foreknowledge of its portent.

One evening when the moon lifted above the blackjack hills of the North Canadian and garden marigolds gave back its glow, neighbors wandering past

saw a horse hitched beside the picket fence of the little house. They noted the horseman with the girl in the shadows of the porch. That Miss Moore, they agreed with quick response to romance, must have a beau—that strange girl who never seemed to have any company or go anywhere except on long horseback rides.

For an hour dainty heel and clanking spur trod the planked walks of Woodward. His identity unsuspected, the most notorious outlaw of his generation and his girl drew but passing glances during their quiet parade. Folks who knew Eugenia Moore nodded pleasantly and noted that she smiled with some peculiar satisfaction. Well, she had a right . . .

"I've been thinking about going back to New Mexico," said the girl, ever so casually. "I like that country—where you and I first met, Bob . . . You couldn't come along, could you?"

"Like to," said Bob, "but I've got a little job to 'tend to first—something the boys and I have been sort of speculating about."

"You mean—that kind of business?" she asked significantly.

Bob admitted it. The Dalton gang had already planned another raid. Bob was loath to give it up for mere sentimental consideration. I'm sure he did not then know how rapidly Eugenia's illness had progressed. If the girl felt a pang in the face of the inevitable, she hid it well.

"She's going out to Silver City again," Bob told me when he got back to the dugout.

For days he didn't crack a smile. I felt a dumb ache for the girl, an unspoken ache for Bob's obvious misery. Bob's forlorn romance, tided along on occasional furtive visits—this was part of the price he paid for outlawry. Truly a fine love hacked off at the roots. And so it was, in various measure, with all of us in the doomed band. Furtive. Everything furtive, hurried, half enjoyed, curtailed—twisted.

CHARLIE PIERCE and George Newcomb were trustful—fatal flaw in the "man wanted." They were the optimists of our outfit. Their inclination to hobnob indiscriminately and to discount danger was temperamental. It had its roots in good fellowship. As the net began to draw about us we recognized the danger of their overconfidence. It was a menace to ourselves as well as them.

Pierce had been a drifting cowboy, and a good one. He was a particular crony of Bill Doolin. He had a better education than most frontier men. Occasionally in his dealings with more uncouth associates he would use high-falutin words and poetic concepts which subjected him to general kidding.

George Newcomb had adopted the monicker Slaughter Kid. He had once worked as cowboy for old Jim Slaughter, famous Texas cowman and Arizona sheriff. The Slaughter Kid was the runt of our gang, slight and spry, weighing perhaps one hundred and thirty-five. He affected a mustache and goatee. A debonair bantam, always laughing and kidding. Refusing to be serious. There was one strange thing about him. Moved by some obscure impulse, he used to get up at all hours during our night camps and go wandering off in the brush. Sometimes he prowled thus alone for many miles, without any definite objective. Restless as a fox he was.

This was dangerous business. If a posse were to spot the night rover they might easily backtrack him to our bivouac. We remonstrated with George.

"Some day you fellows will get shot in the back," Bob warned both Newcomb and Pierce, prophetically. "You're too careless and confiding."

Bob and I had a conference about the matter.

"We'll have to cut these fellows adrift," said Bob. "They'll draw the lightning down on us."

It was the first time the internal problems of the gang and its personnel definitely began to trouble Bob and myself.

The Dunn boys were Oklahoma farmers. We had known them casually for some time. Polite boys. Too polite, we thought.

Pierce and Newcomb, and Bill Doolin too, rode and fraternized with these farmers considerably.

"You fellows want to watch your step," adjured Bob.

Doolin, Pierce and Newcomb laughed tolerantly.

"What the hell! You're always so damned suspicious, Bob!" they said.

I cite this precaution in view of what later happened in the case of Pierce and Newcomb as an example of the extreme vigilance Bob and I exercised. The alert outlaw acts a good deal by intuition.

Pierce and Newcomb didn't go much on all this poppycock of hunches.

One day Pierce and Newcomb rode again to the Dunn farm. As night fell they bedded down in the open not far from the ranch buildings. For a space their cigaret butts glowed in the dusk. It was a calm hour, so quiet that the two buddies could hear the mouthings of their horses as they grazed near by. For a time, then, it may be, the sanguine outlaws talked together of those obscure matters which to us they had never revealed—the debonair bantam reflectively tugging at his tiny goatee. Then they lay down to sleep. Newcomb stirred. Had he heard something? Had his mystic's nature given some alarm? He was about to rise—but all in one crashing moment his urge subsided. His view of great Orion wheeling overhead was blotted out in an acrid drift of smoke. He twitched and lay still. Pierce, too, gave a final sigh and snored never again.

The boys who had been trustful lay riddled with buckshot. Some of the heavy pellets were imbedded in the soles of their stockinged feet. The angle of incidence had been very low.

Very little was ever made public about the death of these two members of the Dalton band. The newspapers carried a brief account of their having been killed by a posse at the Dunn farm. The details as published were obscure. No posse ever claimed the distinction of the killing. Who, if any one, got the reward that had been placed on the outlaws' heads, I do not know.

Bill Doolin was to cash in at almost the same spot some time later.

"They was all right, them fellers!"

It was an epitaph for Pierce and Newcomb from their rustler friends.

In reciting the death of Pierce and Newcomb I have anticipated the actual chronology. They were still with us, as was Bill Doolin, in the raid on Adair to which we went up in the full of the outlaw's moon.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIGHT AT ADAIR

THIS was the "business" project of which Bob Dalton had given his girl some hint as they said farewell in the garden at Woodward. From our western lair we had skirted in to bivouac on the Neosho River, a few miles beyond Pryor Creek station on the M. K. & T. railway—Bob, Grat, Powers, Broadwell, Pierce, Newcomb, Doolin and myself. For two days we lay in the brush waiting. Our plan was to hold up the Katy express at Pryor Creek, a town of some fifteen hundred inhabitants, south of Adair, Indian Territory.

Before every serious undertaking it was our custom to put a stamp of fate upon the proceedings, to draw cards or flip a coin in fixing the various assignments of the raid. This was done to equalize the chances, to relieve Bob, our chief, from any possible cry of favoritism, and to shift any possible jinx. I usually carried the fateful and much thumbed deck.

Forcing the express car was regarded the most ticklish part of a train holdup; messengers were always armed and some of them had plenty of fighting nerve. Boarding the engine was only a little less hazardous. Next came the intimidation of the train crew and possibly fractious passengers.

There was of course always the unknown factor which might shift the dangerous emphasis here or there. Competition among us for the danger spots had first suggested the cards as a means of impersonal decision. The gamble gave us a sharp preliminary thrill.

On the morning of the holdup I produced the cards. We knelt about a saddle blanket. Grat caught the deal. Up flashed the first card—the ace of diamonds—going to Powers. By prearrangement this meant that he and another member of his choice would take the express car. Powers selected Bob. The cards flipped around. Doolin caught the cock eyed jack. He named Newcomb and Broadwell as his aides to cover trainmen and passengers. The king of spades came up for Grat. He picked me as his comrade to mount the locomotive cab. Finally the deuce, symbol of the horse guard, fell to Pierce.

"Liveryman again!" snorted Pierce in disgust. "If I was drawing for a stock ranch I'd probably get the goat!"

"Speakin' about luck," interrupted Powers suddenly, pointing off, "what would you call that?"

We all looked around. A man was coming across a little clearing. He halted and gaped with curious surprise. I could see him eyeing our rifles.

"Campin'?" he inquired politely.

"Just passin' through," some one answered.

"You ain't seen nothin' of any stray shotes?" asked the farmer. He angled off across the clearing, peering back once or twice, puzzled.

A few hours later the alert station agent at Pryor Creek had correct information as to our whereabouts and our number, if not our identity. But so sure was he that we were the Daltons, and so sure that Pryor Creek was our objective, that he frantically flashed the word to Muskogee.

At Muskogee a posse was hastily mustered during all that afternoon. By evening it had been sworn in and accoutered. The regular night train—the express we intended rifling—would carry a carload of marshals and specially deputized officers. There wasn't time to do much picking. Among the recruits there was considerable swaggering and boastful anticipation. Heretofore the Dalton gang had always had the break—this time the tables would be turned.

Not even the cautioning words of Marshal Johnson or those of his chief associates, Charley La Flore and L. L. Kinney, could dampen the boisterous confidence of the thirteen possemen as they piled into the smoker. Kinney was an express company detective who had smelled considerable burned powder in one fight and another. Charley La Flore was chief of the Territorial Indian Police, a part Choctaw of some fighting repute.

"Don't look like we can depend on some of these fellows any too much if the going gets hot," hazarded Kinney, glancing over the group in the smoker as the train sped north toward Pryor Creek.

"Best we could do," replied Marshal Johnson, without excessive enthusiasm.

They did what they could to prepare their haphazard force for the impending fight, if fight it was to be. Rifles and badges gleamed in the dull swinging lamps of the coach. Kinney looked at his watch.

"We'll get there in half an hour."

The trio lighted cigars and fell silent.

ADAIR is a pleasant and prosperous little farm town in Eastern Oklahoma, not far from where the Ozarks taper off into the Neosho River. Today it has perhaps a population of fifteen hundred. In 1892 it had about eight hundred. Several times a day the Katy trains blew shrill greetings to the townsfolk in brief halts on the Dennison-Kansas City run.

Wakeful citizens used to make diversion of gathering at the little depot to welcome the 10:10 night express from the South.

On the evening of July 14, 1892, the wires chattered with unusual intensity.

Something was in the wind. Dispatchers along the line pricked attentive ears or transmitted the code talk with flying fingers. The Dalton gang was coming up to raid Pryor Creek, just a few miles down the track. They would run into a crashing surprise. Probably be wiped out to a man. News to thrill the entire Southwest!

But we had changed our minds at the last moment. We had anticipated the tipoff by the pig farmer. It was Adair into which the Daltons were riding. Even now we were disposing our horses in a little draw at the western edge of town.

Mind you, we had no way of knowing about the officers in the approaching train. They were indeed a surprise to us. It was the citizens of Pryor Creek we had figured on in making the last moment switch to Adair. The folks of Pryor Creek had had previous experience with train robbers; they had acquired a certain technique of resitance. We knew they would have given us a hot reception, forewarned as they had been.

Adair was familiar territory to Grat, Bob and me. Bob and Grat had marshaled in the district. Only thirty miles away lay Vinita, our former home. More than once on peaceful mission we had tramped along the depot platform and had boarded the Katy express as passengers. The streets were known. Now the scattered elms made deep pools of shadow along the dusty ways as we padded into town, afoot. Over yonder was the station. Quite a few people about. At the last moment Bob had decided to let Charlie Pierce go into action with us. Pierce was elated.

"Ten o'clock," said Bob.

"Looks like we're going to have an audience," commented Powers, indicating the depot loiterers.

"They won't be around long," added Doolin.

"There she comes now," I said. "A little behind time."

"Five minutes late," said Bob.

That delayed arrival of the express might have seemed significant, short as it was, had we had the slightest inkling of what was to come. But it had only served to increase our tension.

A longer stop than usual at Pryor Creek had accounted for the lost time. As the Katy approached Pryor Creek, scene of the expected trouble, the window blinds on the smoker had been pulled down. Engine and train crew naturally knew what was in the wind. So did some of the passengers. The hastily picked deputies had become very quiet. No boastful blatting now. Behind the trio of seasoned officers the men hovered a moment at the doors. Cautiously they piled out as the train slid to a stop. As nothing transpired the possemen again took heart. They began to strut again, importantly, handling their weapons pretentiously before the few hardy citizens who had remained at the railway station.

"False alarm," they chattered—with obvious relief, so the Pryor Creek folk later averred.

"The Daltons must 'a' got word that we were on the train," proclaimed a white faced deputy loudly.

"High tailed it to the tall timber, like them kind o' rannies always does when it comes to facin' the real thing," piped his six foot two companion theatrically.

Thus the five extra minutes had dragged along. The Pryor Creek station agent was wiring a message of relief as the train pulled out.

"We'll make up the time before we hit Vinita," said the engineer to his coal shoveling fireman, "unless we happen to get a long stop at Adair."

The curtains in the smoker were lifted again. Marshall Johnson, Kinney and La Flore looked relieved. They grinned a little sardonically as their henchmen piled boast upon boast as to what they would have done had the Daltons appeared.

"We got a much braver lot o' deputies than I suspected," drawled Johnson.

"They seem right disappointed at missing a scrap," agreed Kinney.

The express was stepping along. She whistled a strident call for the way signal at Adair . . .

WE HAD taken our appointed stand. Bob saw the semaphore light flash on at the depot in answer to the engineer's inquiring blast. He was a bit dubious as to the signal. The loungers at the depot and the station agent worried him too. He and Newcomb, rifles in hand, strode rapidly up the platform. In a moment they had covered the startled group. Newcomb herded them into a compact roundup.

"Is that signal throwed for a stop?" Bob demanded of the agent. The man nodded. "It better be," emphasized Bob, still suspicious, "if you ever expect to throw another!"

"You can see that she's slowin' for the station," replied the agent.

Satisfied, Bob motioned him over under Newcomb's vigilant rifle with the others. They huddled there in fearful curiosity of what was to happen.

Precisely we went into action. Grat and I swung aboard the cab and covered the engine crew. Bob, Broadwell and Powers were beside the now halted train, at the express car. Its doors were closed. The messenger, too, had known what was toward; he had prudently locked himself in down beyond Pryor Creek. Farther down the platform Doolin and Pierce ranged watchfully to cow any possible interference from train crew and passengers.

There was a peculiar reserve in the eyes of the engineer and the fireman after the first startled instant, as they faced Grat and me. A novice at stud poker displays it sometimes when he has an ace in the hole. We noted it and set it down to cool nerve. Engineers are selected from a kind not easily rattled. They know how to face risks and sudden emergencies. In none of our holdups did the engine crew ever show a lack of sand. They were wondering now, these two, when the firing would begin from the smoking car arsenal. It ought to start any instant.

Inside the smoker the veteran officers suddenly had become aware of the singular quiet at the station. They peered out. Got a flash at Doolin and Pierce alongside the train with glinting rifles. Saw the strangely huddled and inert group in the depot shadow. Realized in an instant what portended.

"Well, here they are, boys—the Daltons!" said Marshal Johnson.

La Flore and Kinney grabbed their rifles and made for the platform with the marshal.

"You're jokin', ain't you, Sid?" gasped one of the deputies. "Hell, no!" rasped Johnson.

Swiftly he issued orders. Tried to allay the surprise. Roused the men from sudden stupor. But as the trio of veterans disappeared, panic seized the deputies. Some stood transfixed. Others cast aside their weapons and concealed their badges, as passengers later reported. A few did muster sufficient courage to follow their leaders from the coach to the smoker platform.

Grat and I had taken the engine crew from the cab on the side opposite the depot. We got a flash of three figures scuttling from the smoker into the shadow of a coal shed close to the track. Frightened passengers we thought. Too dark to see plainly . . . The trio were Johnson, Kinney and La Flore.

"We expected you fellers at Pryor Creek," remarked the grizzled old locomotive pilot.

"Well, we didn't like to disappoint you —and here we are," retorted Grat.

"Expected?" I exclaimed, instantly alive to what the engineer's unguarded words implied.

Rifles crashed from behind the dark coal shed. Bullets whacked against the engine, all around us. Johnson, Kinney and La Flore had gone into action. The four of us—the locomotive crew and Grat and I—stood sharply outlined in the light from the fire box. Why we were not dropped at that first surprise volley, delivered from a distance of not more than twenty yards, is inexplicable, unless the three officers were afraid of hitting the engineer and fireman.

Instantly Grat and I began pumping lead into the coal bin, returning two shots to their one; firing blindly because we could not exactly locate the officers. And even as we began shooting Grat yelled to the engineer and fireman—

"Lay down on the ground or you're liable to get killed!"

The two flattened to the earth. A bullet kicked a coal shovel off the tender behind me. Another ricocheted from a drive wheel with a high snarl. And still we stood unscathed. The engine panted lazily like some great immune observer, breathing jets of steam about us. For perhaps twenty seconds there was this sharp exchange of shots. Then the flashes came no more from behind the coal shed.

Either in this first half minute of battle, or later when the shooting became general, Marshal Johnson, Kinney and La Flore all were so badly wounded that they were out of the fight. These three of all the posse alone showed any sustained courage.

BOB, Broadwell and Powers had already forced open the express car. The shooting had ceased. Messenger Williams had shown no resistance. But he had opened the big through safe only after considerable delay, protesting that he didn't know the combination. Bob had just fired a shot close to the messenger's head when he heard an agonizing groan. He whirled around with a tingling shock. From behind a large box protruded the biggest pair of booted feet he had ever seen.

"What you doing here?" demanded Bob, chilled at realization that the man might have killed him.

"Just takin' a ride," stammered the fellow. "I come along with my friend Williams. Reckon I must sort o' dropped off to sleep. What's all the excitement?"

"Sorry to bust in on your dreams this way, stranger," said Bob. "But we won't keep you awake much longer, if your Mr. Williams will kindly oblige by filling this sack quickly."

The tall fellow, we later learned, was a boasted bad man from Texas. He had been placed in the express car for added protection. Powers kept him covered while Bob speeded the messenger in filling the sack with loot. Broadwell watched the door.

As the three of them leaped from the car, Grat and I were ordering the engine crew back into the cab.

"Get goin'!" commanded Grat, at a waved signal from Bob.

"This engine," retorted the old pilot, "is a mighty quick starter—I'm kinda proud of her thataway."

His calm was still unruffled.

As we backed away down the darkened street, there was sporadic firing from various sources. The three wounded officers had managed to get aboard the smoker. The train gathered speed. The red lights of the rear coach glared at us balefully from the dark.

We counted heads. All present.

The man hunt, we knew, would be renewed with vigor. The public clamor and the railroad's exasperation over the posse's fiasco at Adair would goad the chase to far-flung circles. The news of the Daltons' raid had been flashed throughout the whole territory. Posses would even now be organizing in half a dozen nearby towns.

We hadn't been riding more than an hour before we got a scare. Coming out on a cross road, cantering easy after the first dash to conserve the horses, one of the boys speculated about the likelihood of immediate pursuit.

"I'll tell you in a minute if we're bein' trailed," volunteered Bill Powers. He jumped from his mount and whipped off his silk neckerchief.

"Bill's goin' to pull out his famous 'long ear' again," chaffed Doolin, "that he sets so much store by."

Powers politely told him to go to hell and knelt on the ground. He spread the piece of silk on the damp earth, pressed his ear against it, signaled for complete silence, and listened intently. He was applying the "long ear" frequently used

by old plainsmen in our region to locate stampeding cattle or horses. Sounds otherwise inaudible were somehow magnified by this means.

"Bunch o' gallopin' horses," announced Powers seriously, "and gettin' closer."

Even the skeptical Doolin hushed his chuckle. We didn't dare disregard the warning. Quickly we sidled into the brush.

"I'll start the shooting if it's necessary," said Bob.

Here they came, pell-mell—half a dozen riders from the direction of Adair. Suddenly a wild yodeling split the night as they thundered past.

"Your posse," said Grat grinning at Powers, "turned out to be a bunch of more or less innocent young cowboys and their gals—likely on their way to a dance."

THE SPOILS of Adair approximated seventeen thousand dollars. We apportioned it in the Dog Creek hills, where we slept all day resting ourselves and our horses for the westward push into the Osage Country. At dawn of the next day we lay beside the Verdigris River, not many miles from the old Whisky Trail which twists down from the Kansas Line partly through the Indian Territory to the Tulsa region. Once in the thinly settled Osage hills we could throw off any pursuit.

Failure of the picked and forearmed surprise party to annihilate us at Adair infuriated the railway and express companies. Passenger traffic began to suffer because of our raids. Armed guards were placed on practically all important trains. In addition to the rewards already out, the express company placed a prize of five thousand dollars on each member of the band, an aggregate of forty thousand dollars. The combined amounts were the largest ever set upon any outlaw gang. We walked now on the brink of a gold lined grave. And there was need to knit our aggregation to a smaller and more thoroughly compatible group for the sake of better protection.

On this point Bob and I had been in accord for some time previous. Sentimental considerations would have to be waived, strongly as we had by this time become attached to all our raiding fellows. Bob, Grat and I held council of war.

We appraised each man of the band in turn. Everything except the hard exigencies of survival was disregarded. This man and that—would he be dependable in a tight fix? Courage they all had, plenty. But the wit to avoid unnecessary danger? Tact, shrewdness—quite as essential as sand in the craw?

We recalled the picture of Doolin, strutting up and down the depot platform at Adair when the shooting started, wild and unruly, mentally awkward. Valiant but too undisciplined, we concluded. We discussed the dangerous credulity of Pierce and Newcomb. We reflected upon the erratic bravado of certain members who had proposed to rush through the coaches after the Adair holdup and finish the fight with the craven deputies. Could this rampant foolhardiness ever be curbed? And, lastly, we concluded the band was too large. Not enough "divvy" when each split was made.

The band was finally pruned down to Bob, Grat, Powers, Broadwell and myself. Doolin, Pierce and Newcomb were lopped off in such a way as not to create any ill feeling. They simply didn't fit in with our next project, the climax of our career. So that the splitup might have no sting we made a vague future rendezvous with the discarded trio. They rode off together with friendly farewell, circling south toward Skiatook to their separate fates; Pierce and Newcomb to the death already narrated. We never saw them again after the camp on the Verdigris.

ON THE second day after Adair, late in the afternoon, Garrett Johnson came home from business on the Box ranch. Garrett was Julia Johnson's older brother.

"There's a posse down on the Box," he announced at the supper table. "Wanted me to go with 'em. Lookin' for the Dalton boys. Posse thinks they were mixed up in the Adair holdup."

"The Daltons—do you really think they had anything to do with it?" asked Julia, trying to cover her agitation.

"Don't know," replied Garrett. "And I ain't even speculatin'."

"And would they be coming this way?"

"Quite likely they would if they were at Adair," opined her brother. "The posse has heard something. It aims to lay for 'em down there at the Caney crossing tonight."

"You mean the Caney ford on the old Whisky Trail?" inquired Julia.

Upstairs in her room after the dishes had been washed she heard the comment of the men discussing the posse's proposed ambush. With every fiber taut she waited until old Tex's snores announced that the family had gone to bed. Hastily then she donned her brother's riding clothes, boots, overalls, coat and sombrero. The friendly maple tree eased her from the bedroom window to the ground.

With stealthy swiftness she sped to the stables. Flung saddle upon a tough, high headed gray mustang, a tireless traveler. Cajolingly she restrained the pony to a muffled prance until he had carried her beyond hearing from the house. Then she gave him spur, and split the wind toward the Caney. The moon was up. She knew the roads and crosscut trails. Half an hour later she had flitted like a shadow through Bartlesville. If the Daltons were headed for the Osage Hills, and if the posse expected them on the Caney, they would probably be coming in along the road from Claremore to Bartlesville. This surmise helped her fix a general objective.

The night was at its peak when Bob, Grat, Powers, Broadwell and I swung into the Claremore road from a dim side trail. No one in sight. We would be able to cover ground more rapidly on the highway. It would be pleasant to relax for an hour's easier going. Far down to the left a thicker stripe of shadowy trees twisted into the mist. That would be the Caney, with its precipitous muddy banks, treacherous in the dark except at the ford.

"Look out!" warned Bob as a rider cantered cautiously out into the bright moonlight from the roadside shrubbery ahead.

We reined down. Every hand went instinctively toward a gun. The rider came on tentatively.

"Why that's Tex Johnson's gray mustang," I said in amazement. "I'd know that old high head pony anywhere."

"It may be Tex's horse," cautioned Bob, "but what business has he got away down here at this time of night? And that's sure none of the Johnson men ridin' him."

"It's Julia," I said. "I know the way she rides."

She came up to us, and at once we saw the anxiety in her drawn face.

"Emmett," she gasped with a kind of awe at a kindly freak of chance, "I've found you—found you just in time!"

"What fool's errand brings you so far from home, here alone?" asked Bob, cloaking his perplexity with kindly courtesy. He liked Julia.

"I've come to keep you boys from walking into a trap," she retorted, finding her breath. "There's a posse over at the Caney ford. Garrett told me. I myself know there's somebody at the crossing because I saw horses tied off the road. That's why I'm wearin' these clothes—so's I could get through without being suspicioned. Been ridin' since nine o'clock, crowdin' the pony for all he's worth."

"But how did you guess where to find us?" Bob wanted to know, so strangely incredible seemed the meeting.

"I'll tell Emmett," she replied, "if you will all ride on ahead a little." The rest moved on. Julia and I dropped back.

"When I heard you boys might be headed this way I thought maybe you'd be intending to stop off and see me."

Her anxious eyes questioned me. There was in them some rebuke for my long absence and a painful bewilderment at what she guessed of my tempestuous ways since last we had sat under the peach tree.

"Sure," I lied with embarrassment at her inquiry, substituting the wish for the fact. "I was figuring on stopping off to see you—"

"And," she continued, "that would have been terribly dangerous, the way the country's been roused against you boys. Of course I'd been glad to have you come otherwise, but I might have been the cause of your—" Again she was close to tears.

For perhaps half a mile we jogged along close together. We caught up with the others.

"Well, Julia, we owe you a vote of thanks—all of us," said Bob feelingly. "And now you better be scootin' for home. I reckon your father and Mrs. Tex would be doin' considerable worrying if they knew you was out savin' the hides of a pack o' renegades like us . . . Sorry we can't be escortin' you. But that might be dangerous for you. So long, Julia!"

She cut off up a side trail, pushing her wiry bronc to beat the dawn home. Forewarned, we swung higher up the river to avoid the posse at the ford. The Osage hills enveloped us.

CHAPTER XVI

FAREWELL TO WOMEN

REVERTING to our long retreat after the robbery at Adair, we skirted northwest through the Osage and Creek Nations. We rode at night through the more settled regions, and by day in the sparsely populated Indian districts, maneuvering toward friendly ranches along the Cimarron. Posse pursuit dwindled away. The lonely land of the gypsum hills and the sluggish red rivers swallowed us again. Riding, riding . . . It was not until after many days that we learned definitely the results of the fight at Adair.

The three wounded officers were recovering. We heard that with a sense of relief. We knew the trio well, although at the time we had no knowledge that it was Marshal Johnson, Kinney and La Flore with whom we had exchanged shots at the depot coal shed.

Our encounter with the three fighting officers was not unlike a prize ring affair where the combatants salute amiably after the bout. No personal grudge remained on either side.

For a time we holed up in the line camp of John Harliss, a friendly rancher west of Red Fork. Meantime Heck Thomas had taken over the Nemesis rôle from big Bill Smith. He was trying to bait us into various traps.

While we moved about now among the friendly ranchers, isolated range camps, to and from our dugout and such other coverts as fancy or expediency dictated, we were formulating the Coffeyville raid.

Two things I wanted to do before we should ride up to Coffeyville. About both I was reluctant to speak. One was to see our mother again; the other to visit Julia Johnson. Bob agreed to both, and the rest of the band made no protest. And so presently we were cantering toward the Johnson farm, through the still autumn glories of the Osage uplands—Grat, Bob, Powers, Broadwell and I.

Julia and her family had by this time of course heard many tales of our depredations. But Julia had deafened and blinded herself to the reports; she at least professed not to credit us so black as painted.

Halting a little way from the farm, I saw Julia through the field glasses. Apparently the coast was clear. But I had to make certain, not for my own skin alone but also to keep the Johnsons in the clear. This was a surprise visit. It might prove extremely awkward, if not dangerous . . . This was the time for a signal Julia and I had previously agreed

upon. I fired three pistol shots, in quick succession, as an inquiry from the brush. In due time a white rag fluttered from a window. All clear. The boys remaining on guard in the brush chuckled with tolerant appreciation of the melodrama, as Bob and I went to the house.

The family adjourned with Bob to the peach tree seat in the garden so that Julia and I might have our visit alone. It was an embarrassing hour.

I became conscious of the rifle in my lap. And then I rode away. An outlaw has no business having a girl. I shouldn't have come at all.

A few weeks later we were preparing supper one evening in the dugout. Jim Riley rode into camp. He carried a letter for Bob, addressed in an assumed name.

"One o' them billy-doos, looks like—from a certain party," speculated Riley, winking amiably at Bob as he handed him the missive.

Bob read it slowly while the rest of us tackled venison steaks.

"Come on, Bob, read it out," urged Powers. "We're all honin' for a little sentiment to relieve this monotony." But Bob's face was somber.

"Boys," he said, "I don't care what happens to me now."

"What's up?" we asked in anxious chorus.

"Eugenia—she's dead."

A sudden resurgence of her old illness had taken Miss Moore.

Her friend and ours, ex-marshal Canty, had conveyed her last message from Silver City, New Mexico—something for Bob alone. Just what was in the letter he told no one. For an hour he sat stunned while the rest of us made pretense of eating.

Finally he went outside the cabin. I followed him off a little way toward the brush corral. He took out a small picture of Eugenia he had carried attached to his tobacco sack. Not irreverently but with a gesture of finality he tore it slowly in pieces. His last anchor had dragged loose.

For the third farewell we came by night to the home of our mother near Kingfisher. Came *en route* to depredation, Bob, Grat and I. A little distance off we halted, debating, held by an odd restraint. Now at the last minute we couldn't bring ourselves to go into the lighted house. It wasn't that we feared official vigilance which might very well have stood in the shadows about our mother's home. It was a reluctance to hurt her with a swift, futile visit. To arouse hopes which we could not fulfill, to have no comforting answer for questions of maternal concern—no, that would be too cruel. Better she did not know how close we were, her three outlawed sons.

For a moment we saw her in the distant window, her flitting form, setting the house in order for the night. None of us dared look at the other. With one accord we spurred our horses. And at the sound I saw her turn her face to the window, listening intently, as if she heard the passing of the hoofbeats. Such was Bob's and Grat's last unspoken salute to the grand old lady who bore them.

THE INDIAN'S hunting moon was a sharp sickle in the sky as we rode toward our last bivouac in September, 1892. My horse had gone a little lame. Bob and I halted at the Mashed-O ranch northeast of Tulsa to see if Bob Thornton, the friendly foreman, could supply a fresh mount. Cautiously skirting the place, we discovered the presence of Deputy U. S. Marshal Chapman. We saw him and the foreman walk from the stable to the house. Convinced finally that there was no posse about, we rode into the barn. In a short time Thornton came out alone. He was not surprised to find us. Chapman, he assured us, was alone.

"Tell him to come out," said Bob.

"The Dalton boys, Bob and Emmett, have just rode in," the foreman told the deputy. "They want to see you."

Chapman had hunted us. He had strutted up and down the streets of

Tulsa boasting what he would do if ever he came face to face with the Daltons. Now that the meeting was assured he almost had hysterics.

"Reckon they want me to leave my guns behind," he quavered, flinging his six-shooter under the bed.

"Nothin' mentioned about that," Thornton reassured him. "Keep your hardware on. Go out and talk to 'em. They ain't aimin' to hurt you, far as I can make out. Fact is, they're going to stay to supper."

Chapman retrieved his gun. Finally he mustered enough courage to come to the stable, carrying his Winchester as well as the sidearm.

"Howdy, boys," he greeted dubiously, "glad to see you."

"Yeah," said Bob, "I heard you been lookin' forward to this meeting for a long time. It's always a real pleasure to meet up with a brave marshal—there ain't any too many of 'em."

Bob was being extraordinarily polite. Chapman tried to digest the compliment behind a wry grin.

We all went in to supper together. Bob ordered Chapman to sit across the table from us. There we could watch him better. Behind the temporary truce lay the tension of mutual suspicion. It became ludicrous at the table.

Bob and I sat with rifles across our knees. We had insisted that Chapman keep his too. He eyed us furtively, putting up a good front. But when I asked him to pass the beans he dropped them from nerveless hands. The platter fell with a startling crash. All of us jumped. The deputy's hands leaped above his head and his eyes bulged.

"Better put your hands down," I suggested. "You'll need them to eat with."

The cook sniggered as he went for more beans. The tension was relieved. Chapman sagged back into his chair, shamefaced. He seemed to have lost his appetite.

"I'm gettin' mighty tired of this marshal business," Chapman ventured after we had retired to the stable for a talk. He was sounding us out, as we figured.

His eyes became shrewdly questioning.

"What about me joinin' up with you boys?" he proposed haltingly.

Bob looked at him a moment with scathing contempt.

"Fine for you, Chapman, if we were damn fools enough to stick our heads into the noose!"

Still hoping to ingratiate himself, Chapman offered me his horse when he learned that mine had gone lame.

"As good a colt as there is in the Territory," he said. "Take him and welcome."

"I'll give you a hundred dollars and my horse for him," I countered.

Chapman snapped at the offer. We made the deal. Then without solicitation the deputy gave Bob all the Winchester cartridges he had. He went off lamenting that we would not accept him as our undercover man.

The smoke had scarcely cleared at Coffeyville a few weeks later before Deputy Chapman made affidavit that the horse I rode in that battle had been forcibly taken from him at the Mashed-O. He reclaimed the animal. He was a hundred dollars and an extra horse to the good. We had spotted him correctly.

From the Mashed-O we rode leisurely up along the Verdigris. At the end of September we met Grat, Powers and Broadwell by prearrangement and went into camp in the brush fifteen miles south of the Kansas line. It was now but a short jaunt to our final objective. We lay quiet several days perfecting the detail of our proposed double bank holdup. We were excited by the audacious scheme. Never before had even the rashest highwaymen attempted a simultaneous raid on two banks in one town.

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS

BOB DALTON squatted on the ground. He had a stick in his hand. With the stick he was drawing a crude map in the dust. Grat, Powers, Broadwell and I huddled around

him. The glow of a tiny camp-fire laid a brimstone tinge on our faces. It was one o'clock in the morning of October 5th, 1892. We peered over Bob's shoulder as he sketched the plot of Coffeyville to which we would go with the next light of day.

The scene was Onion Creek where the water ran still and dark along the edge of a farm two miles from town. Late as it was, the little fire was kept carefully banked down lest it attract suspicion.

"Here's the way we'll go in," said Bob, illustrating with a scratch of the stick.

The instructions were chiefly for the benefit of Powers and Broadwell. They were strangers in this region. Grat, Bob and I were familiar with every hog trail, for we had come often to Coffeyville in other days. In fact the farm where our parents had once lived lay only a mile away.

"Here," resumed Bob, "is Union Street. We'll go along as far as the old Opera House and tie our horses right there." He made another designating mark.

"The Condon Bank stands at this spot on the Plaza. And there is the First National."

Bob paused and looked at me.

"I'm taking Emmett with me," he announced. "We'll handle one of the banks. You three can take the other. Which do you want?"

"Whatever you say, Bob," spoke Grat.

"You name it," added Powers.

"We'll flip for it," Bob decreed.

The First National Bank would probably be a shade more dangerous because it was farther from the place where the horses were to be tied. I produced a coin.

"Heads," I said, "will take the First National. And I'm laying my luck on heads this time."

"That goes for me too," said Bob.

The coin spun and fell with a bright gleam beside the fire.

"Heads it is," read Powers. We were all satisfied.

We warmed our hands at the fire.

"Colder'n hell," said Broadwell.

"Probably be a lot warmer tomorrow," retorted Grat significantly.

Far off the excited barking of a dog broke the stillness. Instantly all hands were alert.

"Check down that fire," warned Bob. Somebody cast a few handfuls of dirt on the blaze. The barking died away.

"Probably old man Davis' watchdog chasin' a varmint," offered Grat. How sharply each detail comes back to me now!

"Two o'clock," remarked Broadwell. "I'm turnin' in for some sleep."

"Before we hit the blankets," interposed Bob, "we'll turn ourselves inside out."

We performed the customary protective ritual. Every man searched himself for any evidence which might serve to identify him, incriminate his fellows or innocent persons in case of disaster. Into the embers of the fire went letters and mementoes. Each man had something to contribute.

I took a little locket photo of Julia from my watch fob. It smiled an instant at me from the flames, then curled to ashes. Bob was the last to make his sacrifice—Eugenia's final message in Canty's letter. For an instant the blaze leaped up anew.

The boys rolled into their saddle blankets. I was to stand the dog watch, from four to daylight. I got several hours of restless slumber. Dick Broadwell woke me at the appointed hour. On the Davis farm the roosters were crowing.

ABOVE the creek bank where I had a clear view of our back trail and all the farm checkered prairie I stood throughout the remaining night hours.

Watch hours are long hours . . .

What would they be apt to do, these staid dwellers of the town, when within a few hours a wilder stripe of man should come galloping in to ravage their golden treasure?

This would be our first daylight operation. It would be considerably unlike train holdups in which we had perfected a routine and a technique. The banks were in the center of a fair-sized town. People would be all around us. Daylight would reduce the element of safety. We would be split up into two small contingents, operating separately—two men and three men. It would be ticklish work. A thrill lifted my scalp. This was to be the big show of our career. Something that would make the nation gasp. A piece of high and dangerous effrontery.

A quick strike. A few minutes of tension in the banks. A swift retreat. The long forced ride to the Cherokee Strip where a covered wagon with supplies and ammunition would be standing by to transport us westward in the guise of emigrants. And thence into the mountain fastnesses of New Mexico. So I rehearsed the plan.

Amos Burton would be waiting with the covered wagon at a designated place. Amos was black as the ace of spades—on the outside. Beneath his skin he was "white" as any man. He was noted as a cowpuncher and broncho buster throughout Oklahoma and northern Texas. He had been well raised by a white Texas cowman. Many a friendly service he had performed for us. When you gave Amos an order he carried it out, come hell or highwater. We knew he would have the wagon in readiness.

The rifle was cold in my hands when I came in off picket and roused the boys. Day was at hand. Breaking bright. A furtive little breakfast fire which I kindled provided bacon and strong black coffee. Breakfast smoke was rising, too, from Coffeyville and the surrounding farm chimneys.

After we'd had our snack I took Bob aside. I had had time during the night guard to build up a certain worry.

"Maybe you'd better take one of the other fellows with you, Bob, and let me go with the rest to the Condon Bank," I suggested.

I was disturbed about Grat's inclination to be dangerously reckless at critical moments. Holding up two banks simultaneously would require cool self-control and flawless emergency thinking, as well as daring.

"You know how Grat is," I continued.

"I know," said Bob. "Likely to fly off the handle."

One slip might imperil us all. I knew Charlie Ball, cashier of the Condon Bank. He was a cool headed fellow in a pinch. Doubly dangerous because he was sickly.

"Ball," I said to Bob, "might fool the boys. But I don't think he'd fool me. I knew his ways pretty well."

Bob reflected gravely a moment. Then he shook his head.

"No," he said, "I know there's danger. Always is in these things. But I think the boys will be able to look out for themselves. And I want you with me. I don't want to have to be worryin' about what's going on behind me when we get into action."

WE MOUNTED our horses and rode up out of Onion Creek bed into the sunrise. We were timing ourselves to reach town just after the two banks had opened at nine o'clock, and before the merchants might withdraw considerable deposits. Grat, Bob and I had been in both banks many times. We knew their personnel. We were also acquainted with all the prominent merchants and with every law officer of the town.

Across the fields we jogged leisurely to the county road. We turned northeast. The horses were skittish. They sensed impending excitement, as they always did on the verge of a foray. We had to rein them in firmly. Couldn't go too fast. Got to time it just right . . . Two miles to go. That might take fifteen or twenty minutes.

Now we were passing the old farm home of our parents, half a mile to the right. The big light green house and the

red weathered barn stood out clear and remembered in the still autumn morning. Farms lay all about us. Here and there men were already in the field.

Far off from the town we heard the thin chime of a school bell. Slowly we rode. And now that we were actually on the last lap to the raid, the edgy nervousness died down in me. Even the cawing of the crows seemed less doleful.

"Prosperous lookin' country," commented Broadwell, a stranger hereabouts.

"Old Amos Burton may have to hitch a double team to that covered wagon to carry the load," I put in, a vision of gold dancing before my eyes.

Amos didn't know our present mission. His eyes would bulge as we unloaded the loot. I chuckled at the thought . . . Laughter, palaver and horseplay among us five as we trooped the last mile to town.

We rounded a turn in the road, and there it lay—Coffeyville!

Sprawled out on a little mound in the prairie, peaceful and familiar in the sunshine. Here rose a church steeple. There was the school. The more pretentious houses. The stores ranked around the central Plaza.

"Some changes since we were here last," voiced Bob.

"Quite a lot of new buildings going up," said Grat. "Town's growing."

"Prosperous," reiterated Broadwell. "Quite a swell little burg."

And over yonder the banks, the Condon and the First National; neighborly rivals, only a few yards apart.

Changes. Yes there had been some changes. The night before I had suggested to Bob that it might be well for me to ride in and reconnoiter—check up anything that might prove a hitch in our plan of maneuver. But Bob had vetoed the proposal. He was afraid I might be recognized . . . I have often wondered how such a preliminary inspection might have altered the fortunes of the Dalton gang.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FINAL RECKONING

A GROUP of negro workmen were tearing up a portion of Union Street in the town of Coffeyville a little after nine o'clock on the morning of October 5, 1892. With pick and shovel they labored, slowly, after the manner of their race. A few belated children were hastening to school. A woman was digging up some flower bulbs. In the blacksmith shop somebody was getting a horse shod.

"I'll be damned!" suddenly spoke Bob. "Look, the hitchrack's gone. Torn down to fix the street where them darkies are workin'." This was the rack where we had intended tying our horses beside the Opera House.

"This street'll be bad to get out of," added Bob. "Horse might stumble. Got to find another place." He peered around quickly, estimating. "Back yonder in the alley," he indicated.

We turned and cantered in behind the blacksmith shop and the lumber yard. There the alley widened to considerable area. And there folks often hitched their horses to a fence rail while they did their trading.

We tied our horses in the alley.

9:40 now.

Looking east through the alley, which opened on the triangular central Plaza, we could see the front of the First National Bank. Adjoining it, and also plainly visible, was Isham Brothers hardware store. As events turned out we could not have placed the horses in a more dangerous spot.

As we started off Bob's horse, a big bay, turned his head and whinnied.

"All right, old-timer," Bob called over his shoulder. "We'll be back in a jiffy."

At our left, as the five of us strode swiftly out of the alley walking east, stood the Condon Bank, located in the Luther Perkins Building. It occupied the north end of the Plaza, fronting south. On three sides were plate glass windows. It was like a showcase into which the sun

streamed brightly. It was perhaps fifty paces from the First National. On our left, also, in order from the alley, were McKenna & Adams clothing store, Wells Brothers general merchandise store and the old Opera House. At our right on this side of the plaza were Slausson's drug store, a furniture shop, the postoffice and Reed Brothers clothing store. Another tier of stores occupied the southern end of the Plaza, and on the eastern frontage, flanking both sides of the First National Bank and Isham's place, stood Boswell's hardware store, Rummell's drug store and Brown & Cubine's shoe shop. These places, then, formed the gallery from which the deadliest street battle in the West was to be viewed and from which it was to burst in a tornado of fire within a few minutes.

The Plaza, thus encompassed by buildings, was paved entirely with brick. Our feet made a scuffing noise on it as we advanced—Bob and I ahead, Grat, Powers and Broadwell just behind. Hitching racks lined the sides of the open area. Several teams were there. Draymen were wont to stand in the Plaza with their wagons, awaiting business. Drayman Charlie Gump was the first on hand this morning. He looked at us with idle curiosity as we neared the banks.

EIGHTY feet from the alley mouth, Grat, Powers and Broadwell wheeled sharply and entered the Condon Bank. Bob and I proceeded without looking back, toward the First National. There was a scattering of people on the streets. But thus far we had attracted no special notice. Men walking with rifles in hand was not of itself a suspicious circumstance.

Suddenly Charlie Gump's eyes bulged. From where he sat sunning himself on his draywagon he could look straight into the Condon Bank. He saw the first move of the holdup by Grat, Powers and Broadwell—saw it like a show from a reserved seat. In a flash he knew.

"The Daltons!" shrilled Gump, leaping from his wagon.

Now Bob and I as we went swiftly toward the First National had also become significant. Once more he cried out the alarm:

"Look out! The Daltons!"

It wasn't a matter of recognition but of correct assumption. His startled outcry echoed across the Plaza. Immediately a dozen of Coffeyville's many dogs began barking in agitated bedlam. For a moment the few residents who were abroad around the square stood stock still. Charlie Gump's feet scuffed rapidly on the brick pavement as he ran toward Boswell's hardware store.

Bob whirled and fired at Gump in an effort to check the alarm. The bullet took him in the hand. He scuttled into the store. The dogs continued yapping.

If the town of Coffeyville had apprehended a raid by the Daltons, as some have claimed, it was now strangely inert and unprepared. Awakened suddenly to danger by Gump's affrighted yell, the citizenry were held numb with shock and indecision in the stores and along the streets. For minutes no one raised the mustering call to arms.

In the Condon Bank Grat had covered Cashier Charlie Ball with his Winchester. Charles T. Carpenter, the vice-president, also stood with hands raised. Broadwell and Powers held guns on T. C. Babb, the bookkeeper, and on one other man in the bank. The outlaws scooped fifteen hundred dollars of counter cash into a sack Grat carried.

"Open the safe, and open it quick!" Grat commanded the cashier. Ball hesitated—Ball, the sickly man of cool nerve and rigid discipline.

"It's a time lock," parleyed Ball with courageous wit. "Doesn't open until 9:45." He slanted a shrewd look at Grat.

Grat hesitated, indecisive. The statement surprised and momentarily baffled him. The moment for swift, unerring decisiveness had come. But Grat, Powers and Broadwell let it slip.

9:42 now. For a moment every eye

clung in fascination on the hands of the wall clock. Suppose it should stop. What then?

"We'll wait three minutes," said Grat.

If he or his two companions suspected a ruse, none of them made any effort to verify the cashier's statement or call his audacious bluff. In relating the details later, Ball said he had spoken on impulse. But once having made the fateful assertion, he could not retract. Ball realized how precarious his position was. Like all the others in the bank and in the adjacent streets, he had heard the drayman's outcry and Bob's shot. He was certain that the trio of outlaws who held him covered were only part of the raiding force. His life might be forfeit any moment. But he stood pat.

While Grat, Powers and Broadwell played their waiting game, the bank door opened to the rushing entrance of John D. Levan. He was a money lender. He had heard Gump's shout. Without knowing the exact situation, Levan had hastened to warn the Condon Bank people.

"The Dalton's are here—" His words choked in a gulp of amazement as Grat grabbed him and lined him up with the others.

Vice-President Carpenter quieted Levan's terror with a look of calm reassurance. Even in this crisis his imperturbable good nature and resignation to the inevitable could not be jolted. What was to be would be; Carpenter trusted in the Lord.

9:43 Ball's strained face turned a shade whiter. Outside somewhere along the Plaza a gun cracked. Another. The sweat broke out on the cashier's forehead. Doggedly Grat, Powers and Broadwell waited.

I have dwelt at some length on Ball's behavior. His was the decisive act in Coffeyville that day. His shifty falsehood about the vault—which all the time was open to any hand—was to save his bank eighteen thousand dollars It was also to cause the death of eight men within the next five minutes.

MEANTIME Bob and I had entered the First National. I was a few feet ahead. In the bank at the time were Thomas G. Ayres, cashier, Bert S. Ayres, his son and assistant cashier, W. H. Sheppard, the smiling and gracious teller, and a bookkeeper whose name I have forgotten. These comprised the official force. In addition, three customers were present; J. H. Brewster, a prominent contractor, C. H. Hollingsworth, and Abe Knott, a deputy sheriff of Montgomery County.

Knott had just cashed a four-dollar check. He stood with his back to me as Bob and I came through the door. I recognized him as he turned in surprise at my command of "Hands up!" And immediately I knew that we might have a dangerous man to deal with in Abe Knott.

His hands had gone up, still clutching the four dollars in his closed fist. He wanted to save that money, as he later told me. His hand kept straying downward. He hoped to slip the bills into his vest pocket. I thought he was watching for one split second of relaxed vigilance to grab the six-shooter I saw at his belt. He would have done it with a fraction of a chance. Abe Knott, Kentuckian and fighting man, had plenty of sand in his craw.

"Keep 'em high!" I warned. "I don't want your chicken-feed."

Tom Ayres had dodged down behind the counter at my first command. I expected him to come up shooting. I had to watch him as well as the deputy sheriff for a tense moment. But Bob, who had entered right behind me, edged around and covered him. The others were standing as ordered.

Throwing Ayres a sack, Bob ordered him to put the money in it. He started dumping in trays of silver.

"Keep that silver out," Bob spoke. "It's too heavy to bother with. The vault!" he rapped. "The big stuff!"

Tom Ayres opened the vault and threw the currency into the sack. Things were

going like clockwork here at the First National. Not more than a minute had elapsed since Bob and I came through the front door.

Here, too, a clock was ticking on the wall.

In the stores along the Plaza the citizens were coming out of their coma of fright. If they had been slow to start, they were now making up for lost time. There was a scurrying toward the first concentration of resistance. A stealthy mustering.

Word of the raid was being flung all across the town:

"The Dalton gang—they're holding up both banks! Already wounded Charlie Gump!"

The First National vault had been emptied.

Bob and I were already marching the bank officers and the three customers toward the front door. Bob was ahead. I brought up the rear, lugging the weighty money sack. Bob stepped out and peered quickly about.

Whang! came the first opposition shot. The bullet smashed into the door casing. Bob jumped back into the bank, grinned and said—

"Bum shot!"

We herded the bankers and the customers out through the door—all except Sheppard, the teller. Knott was watching like a hawk for a chance to shoot. We hadn't disarmed him. But he edged out, and his chance was gone.

A glance through the front window revealed men scurrying this way and that, every one acting on his own, like a squad of deploying soldiers without an officer. Some were hastening to arms. Others were running to cover. There was a scattering of shots toward the First National as soon as the men we had sent through the front door had got in the clear.

Those were the shots the group in the Condon Bank had heard as the minute hand on the wall clock hung ominously at 9:43.

The battle had opened.

"CAN WE get out the back way?" I asked Sheppard, whom I had kept covered while Bob watched the front door for a possible rush.

"The back door's open," calmly announced Sheppard.

He had remained coolly unruffled throughout the holdup. Even in these circumstances he could be polite. A fragment of his celebrated smile still clung to his lips.

"It leads to the alley," he concluded.

"You come and show us." I insisted.

He led us to the rear door. It was open. I finished tying the money sack in the middle so that it would hang securely over my arm. We ordered Sheppard back into the bank. Then Bob and I stepped out into the alley. Out front the crackle of the guns was increasing. But here for a moment everything was clear.

"You look after that money sack," said Bob. "I'll do the fighting."

Lucius Baldwin, a young clerk in Boswell's hardware store, emerged from the store into the alley. He came trotting toward us with a revolver in his hand.

"Hold up there!" Bob called, withholding his fire.

But the clerk kept on coming, at a dog trot. He did not fire, and he did not speak. Some strange confusion upon him. Like a somnambulist he moved, gun leveled at us.

Bob fired. The ball struck Baldwin in the breast. He crumpled up, the revolver skittering from his hand. Before he died, Baldwin said he had heard Bob call to him to halt, but he was too overcome with fear and surprise either to shoot or stop.

We hastened north through the alley behind the bank, turned left on Union Street, and within a few yards had come around to where we were exposed to the gathering storm in the Plaza. Now for the first time the citizens saw us and had us a few moments in the clear against the sights of their rifles. On the instant the hitherto desultory and rather aimless shooting burst into a crescendo

of fire. The din became terrific. Teams hitched along the square and in the adjacent streets broke loose and ran helter-skelter.

Bob and I had snapshot flashes of heads peering from doorways, appearing at store windows, shouting imprecations; faces in strange grimaces of terror or fighting fury. The shooting was as yet still wild and spasmodic. The townsfolk were still in the first jumpiness of buck fever. For a moment it seemed inexplicable that Bob and I should be the target for so much flailing lead and yet remain unsinged. Then I realized that while some of the shots were coming in our direction, most of them were being directed into the front of the Condon Bank. I still carried the money sack, and Bob squinted warily for a chance to score.

Now two of Coffeyville's brave, embattled citizens stepped into the open, George Cubine and Charles T. Brown. They were partners in business. Cubine was an expert bootmaker. He catered to the cowboys' taste in fancy footwear. Years before he had made boots for Bob, Grat and me. He knew us well.

Cubine came out of his shop with Winchester in hand. Brown followed at his heels, himself unarmed. Cubine swung down on us. As he did so, Bob took a flash shot. Cubine fell dead before he could fire. Brown, undaunted, stooped down and took the rifle from the dead man's hands. He leveled at us. No buck fever in Cubine and Brown. Bob shot again. Brown died beside his partner.

At the moment I was slightly ahead of Bob. Hampered by the heavy money sack, I had reached cover behind the corner of the Perkins building.

It was for the death of Cubine that I was later convicted, although I had not fired a shot at him.

"Go slow," Bob said as he came to my side. "Take it easy—I can whip the whole damn town!" We jogged around into the alley behind Wells Brothers general store, momentarily secure. We did not yet know how thoroughly roused and determined the citizens were. Even their hectic fire hadn't greatly alarmed us, although it was the first time we had met such general resistance.

At the moment we had no inkling of how Grat, Broadwell and Powers had fared. We did not yet know of their fatal mistake in accepting Ball's statement about the time lock on the Condon Bank vault. We assumed they had already come back to the horses toward which we were now hastening.

As we came down the alley behind the Wells store, little Bobby Wells, fourteen years old, ran out of the back door with a .22 revolver in his hands. Waving it at us with boyish menace, he demanded truculently—

"What're you fellers doing here?"

For a moment the boy's sudden appearance flabbergasted us.

"You run home, boy, or you're liable to get hurt," said Bob.

He spanked the lad lightly on the seat of the pants with his rifle. Frightened but game, Bobby retreated—and lived to become one of my best friends.

We were surprised not to find Grat, Broadwell and Powers at the hitching rack. A thundering crash of shots resounded from the Plaza.

"What's keeping the boys?" Bob muttered anxiously as I tied the money sack to the saddle.

THE Isham Hardware store, adjoining the First National Bank, afforded the best cover for the fighting citizens, and there a crowd had gathered. From the showcases they had armed themselves with rifles and revolvers. They had spotted us as we came to the horses. The open alley gave them an unimpeded range. Bullets were whining about our ears even before I had the money sack secure. Bob began pumping his Winchester, swinging it this way and that in rapid arcs, still believing that he might be able to terrify the opposition.

But by this time the citizenry were be-

yond intimidation. A fog of acrid gun powder smoke began to swirl lazily in the October sunshine. And still no sign of our three comrades.

"Boys must be in trouble," exclaimed Bob. "We better go and help 'em out."

Here we were, Bob and I, with good assurance of safety only a few yards down that alleyway. All we had to do was fling a leg to saddle and make a dash for it.

"Come on," said Bob, walking into the line of fire. "We'll go and help 'em." I don't believe it was even a test of Bob's loyalty, in the sense that test implies deliberation. I went by his side. For myself I recall no definite sensation of fear or anxiety. We were still on the swelling tide of battle.

The fight burst once more with a sudden crash in front of the Condon Bank as we came toward the head of the alley on the Plaza. It was Grat, Powers and Broadwell coming out.

With foolish but magnificent courage Grat had been counting the ticks of the clock on the bank wall. What was transpiring in that deadly showcase had been as plain as day to a hundred hidden and squinting eyes on three sides of the Plaza. Despite the danger to the bank officials, lead had poured like hail against the bank front, shattering windows, pitting the woodwork. At the first crash Grat had ordered all except Cashier Ball to flatten on the floor.

"Get down, or you might get killed," he roared.

Grat himself stood behind a window casement, partially protected. Broadwell and Powers were under precarious cover. Broadwell had in his hand the sack with the counter cash, about $1500 —the meager silver measure of his life and of Grat's and Powers'.

Ball stood by the safety vault, continuing his magnificent bluff. He too watched the hands of the clock. Half a minute more. The sickly, taciturn man who had closed his mind against everything except that rigid conception of his duty did not flinch. And Ball won his grim gamble.

Before the clock had ticked off the few remaining seconds, the fire had become so intense and the rally of the citizens so ominous that even Grat, for all his reckless nerve, considered it best to make a desperate retreat.

A shower of glass was falling about them, wood splintering. Death was fanning hot and close. Eighty bullet holes were later counted in the Condon Bank building. Suddenly all the gold in the Condon vault had no value to the outlaw trio. They drew together for the rush.

And now they were coming out. From our exposed position in the alley we saw them break cover. They came out shooting.

For a moment the attention of Bob and myself was distracted. The firing zone had spread. Behind the back doors and windows of the stores to our left there was a stir, a movement of skulking figures. A negro porter, startled, made a confused break from the rear of Slausson's drug store. Bob whanged at him. The negro quickly dived back in through a window.

A few scattering shots were beginning to come from this new quarter.

Bob pumped his gun at the doors and windows and at every sign of mobilizing menace, partly to protect himself and me, and also to keep the way of retreat clear from possible enfilading fire for Grat, Powers and Broadwell. They were now backing across the sixty feet of exposed Plaza toward the alley in which we waited.

They came very slowly, it seemed to me, but their Winchesters kept pouring a leaden hail toward the Isham store. They were in turn receiving more than they sent.

It was during this hot exchange that Cashier Ayres of the First National fell wounded. He and the others who had been in the bank had taken refuge in this store after we had turned them loose.

OVER at the Condon Bank the men who had flattened to the floor rose cautiously amid the wreckage and peered out to watch the battle. Cashier Ball stepped away from the vault, wiped the sweat from his forehead, brushed the dust from his coat and mechanically walked to the counter, as if ready to resume business. Ball, as I have said, was a man of disciplined routine.

Another historian of the Coffeyville street fight asserts that Broadwell had been shot through the arm before he emerged from the Condon Bank. I do not think this was the case, but if so he did not seem hampered as he and Grat and Powers came down the alley in a haze of lifting smoke.

Powers had come perhaps twenty feet into the alley mouth when he was hit in the arm. I saw him return the shot, after he had regained his balance from the violent impact of the bullet. For a moment he took refuge in a doorway of the McKenna-Adams store, reloading.

I suddenly realized this was to be a fight to the death.

There was no let-up. The terrible frenzy of an aroused citizenry was now upon us in full avalanche. They too knew that some of them must die. But they were not deterred.

Bob and I covered the retreat while Grat and Broadwell hastened toward the horses in our rear. Powers too passed us after he had recovered from the first shock of his wound. We were all together at last. In those few seconds it must have been incredible—some devil's miracle—to the citizens that we were all still on our feet and by way of escaping after so much lead had been flung at us.

Powers had been hit, and was still alive. Broadwell had been hit, and he too was still in the fight. Were the lives of the Dalton band charmed? For a moment the defenders of Coffeyville may have been awed. The firing lulled. Then it broke out again with renewed fury.

A team hitched to a Standard Oil wagon, one of the runaways, broke into new panic at the crash. The driver had taken cover at the start of the fight. The team plunged madly into the alley from behind the ice house. It stampeded straight for the spot where our horses were tied. Our own horses reared and plunged. Any instant they might break loose and leave us afoot. But Grat was thinking fast and straight now. In a flash he shot one of the oil wagon horses in the head, bringing him down and halting the runaway.

The firing from Isham's store was accurate now. The range was about one hundred yards.

I saw Bob stiffen and reel a little. An instant later, as I had my gun up at aim, a Winchester ball took me through the upper arm, shattering the bone. The blow knocked the rifle from my hand. I stooped over and picked it up with my left hand. My right hung useless. Bob sagged down by a pile of rocks in the alley, against a high board fence. He didn't say anything.

As I turned in a temporary daze to reach the horses, I got a second rifle bullet. It smashed through the back of my hip, between two shells in my cartridge belt, and passed out through the groin. For a moment it partially paralyzed my leg.

I had taken only a few limping strides when I saw Grat fall, almost opposite the horses at the rear of the blacksmith shop lot. He did no more shooting, dying within a few moments. He had been shot through the chest.

Meantime City Marshal Charles T. Connelly had maneuvered around into the alley behind us toward the west. Connelly was a brave man. He came right out into the open, among us. When he was shot, and by whom, I do not know. Various members of our band were accredited with the killing. When I saw him he lay on the ground. He had appeared at about the time that deadly volley from Isham's store mowed through the alley. Connelly had been a school professor in a neighboring town. He had

come to Coffeyville on a furlough. The town had made him a temporary officer. This had been his first fight. I have never known a gamer man.

ALTHOUGH now twice wounded, I felt no pain; just a numbness which hampered me as I started untying my horse. Somehow I got the horse loose. All the animals were snorting and skittish. Powers who was starting to mount beside me was having trouble controlling his big dapple gray. Just as he got his leg over the saddle I saw him pitch headlong. A second bullet had killed him instantly.

Broadwell and I were up together. For the moment every man was thinking of himself. Broadwell reeled in his saddle.

"I'm hit bad," he muttered.

Clutching the saddle horn, he put spurs to his horse and clattered down the alley westward. I followed him a few yards. Suddenly I realized Bob wasn't with us. I didn't know he had been so badly wounded. Looking back, I saw him still huddled there against the rocks.

"You go on," I called to Broadwell. "I'm going back."

The alleyway was screaming with shots from Isham's and the Plaza—from everywhere it seemed. Bob's and Powers' horses were killed. Our own firing had left a drifting fog of smoke. It hung over the inert figures of Grat, and Powers, and the huddled form of Bob. Two of us dead now. One mortally wounded. Myself hard hit.

I had trouble getting my horse to face into the smoke. The money sack still hung there on the saddle, ironically. I had no thought now of shooting. Had no thought of anything except to reach Bob. To haul him up behind me, if still he lived, and try to break clear from that inferno. My own life seemed of no importance now—was of no importance. In ten eternal minutes the world had crashed down about me.

Perhaps it is well to quote Emerson Hough at this point, lest I might be accused of some macabre boast.

"Emmett Dalton," Hough in his "Story of the Outlaw," says, "was now the only one of the band left alive . . . He still kept his nerve and his wits even under such pressure of peril. He might have escaped, but instead he rode back to where Bob was lying, and reached down his hand to help him up behind himself on the horse . . ."

My wounds were bringing on nausea. It was all I could do to control my animal. Bullets were still singing. That I was not riddled in that short zig-zag ride to Bob was a miracle.

Meantime Carey Seaman, the barber, had come into action. Seaman had returned from a hunting trip in the Indian Territory just before the battle began. He was unhitching his team at his stable, a block away, when the firing started. In his buckboard was a shotgun, loaded with buckshot. Grabbing it up, he had skirted back through an open lot to the alley. There he was screened from our view by a high board fence. During the deadly volley through the alley he had reached the cover of an outhouse. There he must have been standing as I wheeled to ride back toward Bob. Now he stepped out into the alley, hammers cocked above a double load of buckshot.

"Don't mind me, Emmett," Bob whispered as I leaned down toward him. "I'm done for. Don't surrender, boy. Die game!"

He seemed to realize, although already far gone, that it would be impossible for me to get away now. It was in his mind to give me a supporting word in this business of dying.

Behind me a crashing roar resounded above the thinner din of rifles. Twice it sounded. Carey Seaman had pulled his triggers.

It was all over. With eighteen buckshot in my back, from hip to head, I slid down. The double impact had taken me as I was bending over to catch Bob's last admonition. I clutched at the money sack in my agony. It came loose. I fell

on it in a huddle beside Bob. In his last throe Bob turned laboriously on his side, propped himself weakly on one elbow. With eyes already glazing he fired one last wild shot. And so he died.

Sieved with twenty wounds, I still managed to cling to consciousness. But the world swam far away.

For a moment everything was deathly quiet.

Then rose a dreadful yelping of the dogs. And through the lifting smoke fog began to come the citizens of Coffeyville, the men who had exterminated the Dalton band. Their feet scuffled hesitantly across the brick Plaza and down the alley. Vaguely I saw them in a swimming haze. Coming to count the dead. Coming to recover the sacked loot, some twenty thousand dollars.

Dick Broadwell, fatally wounded, had ridden a mile from town where he toppled dead from the saddle.

Less than ten minutes had elapsed from the time the five of us had entered the banks. The shadows of the buildings across the alley hadn't shifted more than an inch. The clock in the Condon Bank had moved its black hands but a brief span since Grat had first glanced at it.

In that short interval eight men had died: Bob and Grat Dalton, Dick Broadwell and Bill Powers of the outlaw band; Cubine, Brown, Baldwin and Connelly, among the citizens.

Four had been wounded; three citizens —Thomas G. Ayres, of the First National bank, T. A. Reynolds, a clerk at Isham's, and Charlie Gump, the drayman—and myself. The remarkable thing was that not an unarmed man had either been killed or wounded, despite the fact that more than one hundred shots had been fired.

Col. D. S. Elliott, G. A. R. veteran and owner of the Coffeyville *Journal*, made the statement that for the number of men engaged and the time consumed the casualties were heavier here than in any battle of the Civil War.

The curtain had come down on the most deadly street battle of the West.

CHAPTER XIX

RETRIBUTION

AFTER the Coffeyville battle I was carried to a vacant room above Slausson's drugstore. There I lay on a long bare table the rest of that day and night. It was thought I should die of my many and serious wounds. I was half delirious. Doctors Hall and Ryan wanted to amputate my arm. It was badly smashed. But I refused to permit it.

"If I'm going to cash in," I decided, "I'll go into the grave in one piece."

The following afternoon I was removed to a room in the little hotel where I lay five days more.

Echoes of the fight had scarcely died away before excursions were run into Coffeyville from a radius of fifty miles around. The two railroads did a thriving business. Hotels, lodging houses and many homes were filled with morbidly curious visitors. For a time the situation became ominous. Five thousand persons in a three-thousand resident town, many of them liberally bathed in "mountain dew," presented a formidable problem for the city marshal.

Street rumors of impending trouble grew. There were some efforts at mob rule. But quickly the more responsible citizens rallied around the marshal's small force. One of the stalwart citizens among many who were determined that the law should take its decorous course was Col. D. S. Elliot, owner and editor of the Coffeyville *Journal*. Others were the Isham brothers, out of whose store the most effective shooting had come; Luther Perkins, owner of the Condon Bank Building, and probably the wealthiest man in town, and the Wells brothers, prominent merchants and political leaders who were to remain my life-long friends. These men, while they didn't condone my part in the fray, formed a protective group against any incipient violence. They personified the spirit of the old West toward a fallen foe.

With ghoulish curiosity the visitors

thronged the streets. They gaped up at the window of my hotel room—"The only one that survived is a-layin' up there. And they say he's all shot to pieces. Liable to die any minute. Can't possibly pull through." I heard the buzz of their voices.

"There goes Charlie Ball," ran the voices. "Cashier of the Condon Bank. He fooled the Daltons. Charlie Ball was a cool one."

The awed and gaping transients also gave audiences for boasted exploit by those who wished to stand out as heroes. Many a man who had cowered in terror recited how boldly he had stood in the forefront of the fight. From under counters, cellars and from out of sugar barrels they had emerged, when the shooting was done, to proclaim their deeds of valor.

The real valiants in the Coffeyville fight—those who actually did the work of extermination, as I happen to know—said little about it, claimed no glory for their deed.

Word of the Dalton gang's extinction and of my own dubious survival had been flashed down through the Territory. Within a few hours it had reached the Texas Johnson ranch, some thirty miles below the Kansas border. A few hours later it had crashed like thunder in the ears of my mother near Kingfisher.

Next day Julia Johnson stood beside my bed in the little hotel room.

"Some girl's come to see that dying outlaw," chattered the voices of folk hovering about the hotel. "His sweetheart from down Oklahoma way, they say."

However Julia may have hitherto blinded herself to my dubious activities, there was now no longer any need for subterfuge. She accepted the situation open eyed. I had gone a nefarious way. Now I must pay the penalty. That was how it was. A thing done. My life shattered. Hers suddenly bereft of joyous hope. Even if I lived, there would be long prison years ahead. But these dreads and dark prospects she fought down as she took my hand.

"You're going to get well," she said with conviction.

"And you," I asked, "what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to stay here near you as long as I can. Afterwards—well, I'm going the whole way with you, no matter what happens."

It took my mother three days to arrive from Kingfisher. With her came one of my sisters. Also my brother Bill who had come back from California on a visit. Mother Dalton was too late to see her sons Bob and Grat buried. She didn't say much. And what could I say? The thing she often must have contemplated had befallen at last. The inevitable had happened. Her eyes looked very old with unutterable pain as she sat beside my bed. Three of her boys were now dead by gunshot. Dead by violence; Frank, the intrepid and respectable marshal, Bob and Grat the bandits. What lay in her Spartan heart I was then too sick fully to comprehend . . . Mother of officers and outlaws.

Bob, Grat and Powers were buried together in Coffeyville. Broadwell's folks took his body home to Hutchinson. The citizens laid away their dead defenders. For a space I heard the slow clangor of the church bells.

And then I went up to judgment.

ON A STRETCHER I was carried to the county jail at Independence, Kansas. Slowly my wounds began to knit. All except my shattered arm, which troubles me to this day—a constant reminder of that tragic yesterday.

Five months later I appeared before Judge J. D. McCue. Technically I was charged with the shooting of George Cubine and Lucius Baldwin, in addition to bank robbery. My attorney, Joseph Fritch, felt assured that if I pleaded guilty to second degree killing in the Cubine case the other charges would be dismissed. He also felt reasonably certain that I would get close to the minimum sentence, perhaps ten to fifteen years.

I did plead guilty—and was sentenced to life imprisonment at the Kansas State Penitentiary in Lansing.

I hobbled into prison on crutches.

Seven years later Judge McCue, then no longer on the bench, visited me and assured me he would recommend commutation to ten years. But he failed to do so.

In due time, many prominent citizens, feeling that some tacit agreement with the court had been violated at the time I pleaded guilty, rallied to my aid in a very material way. Their sustaining interest and loyal friendship during my prison years were a great comfort and a constant inducement toward eventually reclaimed citizenship.

Of the $40,000 reward that had been placed on the heads of the Dalton band, only $2000 was ever paid, so far as I was able to ascertain. City Marshal Connelly's widow received a small portion. The widows of Cubine and Brown got the rest.

Out in the Cherokee Strip, Amos Burton, the negro cowboy, had waited three days beside the covered wagon. Concluding finally that something had gone wrong, he returned to Hennessey. There he heard the news. Nevermore would the Dalton boys need ammunition or fresh horses.

Loyal Amos Burton merely shook his black head and looked solemn. That was his way of mourning the boys who "had done treated him mighty well."

Cowboy, officer, outlaw, prisoner. Thus had gone my evolution. I had just turned twenty-one on entering prison—the legal age of manhood. What now to do with the interminable years that stretched ahead?

I was assigned to the tailor shop to learn the trade of cutting and fitting men's clothes; one of those prosaic jobs I had so long held in contempt. I measured and fitted the clothes of the prison guards, and the striped garments which at that time were the habiliments of the cage.

Right away I began to plan how I might get out of these walls. Not by some desperate break in the face of the rifled patrols, but "through the front gate." But with what magic password? How to beat a life sentence? And so for the first time in my life I began earnestly to take stock of myself. What were my resources?

Hard riding and straight shooting. A calloused mind in a tough body. No good here—all the things I had perfected for my dark profession. One other thing. A close mouth. A lesson learned from outlawry.

And, curiously, this was to be my ace card in the patient game whose high stake was freedom.

Guard and prisoner alike soon understood that I would not snitch or turn stool pigeon. That begot confidence from both factions. Confidence, the first white chip in the game. They let me alone to work out my problem, to adjust myself, to transform my attitude toward life.

Lansing penitentiary was my high school. Under its grim gun towers on the bluffs of the Missouri River I was to learn the tardy lessons of enforced behavior.

Parole, pardon—one or the other could be achieved. Would I have the long patience, the steadfast power of endurance, to weather the years that must intervene at best? Once I had answered that question to my own satisfaction during the night watches in the cell, all thought of swifter escape vanished from my mind.

I had another tremendous incentive and inspiration—Julia.

She would wait for me.

Some statistician in these matters has declared that two years is the average time a prisoner's woman will cling to him—to the hope or desire of reunion.

Julia Johnson had to wait for fifteen years.

She waited them patiently and loyally, for some inscrutable reason known only to the good Lord and the good women who bother about men like me.

CHAPTER XX

KISSING THE ROGUE

ONE THING puzzled me profoundly for a long time when I began taking thought in prison: the curiously inconsistent attitude of the American public toward its malefactors.

Today as never before the scapegrace is the demi-hero of countless fictions, in book, on stage and screen; a picaresque fellow of song and story at whose clever outwitting of the law great audiences laugh and thrill sympathetically. The cult of the Rogue!

But let him not be jailed, for then the iridescent bubble is pricked. Once call him convict, and the rogue becomes merely a shabby, despicable creature. Strange anomaly!

The kid-gloved bandit, a courtly figment of popular fancy, is the current fashion in outlaws.

It is enough to make the old time outlaw, rough and tough and sailing under no false colors, turn over in his unhallowed grave. Even Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest wouldn't recognize himself in the idolatrous cloak posterity has flung across his phantom shoulders.

And so it is with the fictions of the old West—the vanished West of grim, glamourous figures. How much of romantic nonsense woven in with the fact!

If the wilder days and ways of the frontier are to be historically preserved, it is high time that some vigorous debunking take place while yet a few old-timers live to tell the tale accurately. Perhaps in the passing I can strip off at least one thin layer of the veneer that covers the truth.

The widely heralded frontier rite of filing notches on gun handles to enumerate the desperado's death tally; the presumptive trick of "fanning a gun"; the alleged "two-gun man"; the preposterous death toll credited to notorious outlaws and peace officers—all the gory technique of the Western "hero"—how exaggeration has pyramided up on the bold facts!

Personally I have met hundreds of bad men, hard men, shooting men, killers, both peace officer and outlaw. And I have yet to see the first notch on any of their six-shooters. I have, however, seen fake bad men ostentatiously file dummy notches.

Men who killed other men, I observed, did not boast of it. They did not advertise their prowess, aggressive or defensive, by cutting a notch on a gun. It is a fiction writer's elaboration.

Never did I see a man "fan" his six-shooter.

Never did I see any shooting from the hip.

Never did I see a man waste precious ammunition by using two guns simultaneously. Bob Dalton was accounted one of the best shots in the Southwest, with rifle, pistol or shotgun. Never once did he indulge any of the phony stunts attributed to so many "master" gunmen of the old Border.

Indeed, the six-shooter's deadliness has always been overrated. The number of shots fired, and the net results, in numerous historic frays with this weapon make an almost ludicrous contrast. How often, in accurate accounts of the "carnage," does one come across the phrase, alibiing the short gun— "It was a miracle that so few were killed."

Many old-timers have a way of romancing about the things they saw or heard tell—like old soldiers' accounts of battles.

I recollect one time in New Orleans when a venerable judge, undoubtedly accounted the personification of honesty among his friends, told me some very entertaining and luridly circumstantial tales of his encounters with Bob and Emmett Dalton in 1866. I was born in 1871. He didn't know he was talking to the very man he boasted of knowing. I didn't disillusion him. But I had never before seen or heard of him. He represents a type of fabricator whose "recollections" have colored much of Western lore.

If all the men who claimed to have known the Jameses and the Youngers and other outlaw notables, the Daltons in-

cluded, were placed end to end they would reach well out toward the moon.

Jesse James was killed by Bob Ford's shot in the back of the head as he stood unarmed and unsuspecting. For this act Ford came to be more universally hated than even the lethal James. Perhaps Ford thought he would be acclaimed for his dangerous and almost miraculously successful venture. He was ridding the country of a "terror." But immediately, by that strange public revulsion, the terror became the martyr. And Ford became a reviled "assassin". If scores of folk sang the familiar ballad, "Jesse James went to rest with his hand on his breast; the devil will be on his knee," thousands chanted the lines about "the dirty little coward that killed Mr. Howard" (Jesse James' assumed name). Bitter must have been this strange tide of public opinion to Ford until he himself was laid away in a shroud of powder smoke.

Again in the instance of the notorious Sam Bass, who met his fate at Round Rock, this public anathema rested upon Murphy, the traitor of the train robbing band, while Sam, in the cowboy ballad, was sung as "A kinder hearted feller you seldom ever see."

Pat Garrett, noted frontier sheriff of Lincoln County, New Mexico, was hated by a great number of New Mexicans because he killed Billy the Kid, accounted the deadliest youth in frontier annals.

Jack McCall, who shot Wild Bill Hickok in Deadwood, S. D., indicated by his subsequent boasting that he expected to be acclaimed a hero for the assassination of the most famous frontier officer. Wild Bill had at no time been outlaw, but he was a killer, and many there were who had wished him ill. But the citizens of Yankton, in legal manner, hanged McCall with promptitude and considerable gusto.

Strange inconsistency, this public inclination to switch the rôles of "good man" and "bad." Strange the ways of sentiment along that shifting borderland of popular conscience. But treachery, even though it might be for the public good—that is always pilloried and reviled.

Incidentally Bob Ford, killer of Jesse James, was not, as has been so often stated, a cousin of the James boys. He was not of kin. I have this fact direct from surviving members of the James family.

CHAPTER XXI

ADIOS TO VIOLENCE

AFTER my mind had begun to run in orderly channels again within the prison house, I recalled ironically how we had read Bill Doolin, George Newcomb and Charlie Pierce out of the Dalton band because they were not smart enough. How the fates must have guffawed at that! The three of them were still free. Doolin, the valiant clown, and his satellites. Would they be deterred by what had happened to the rest of us? Where did they roam? What new associates had they made? Did they repair occasionally to that old sod hutch amid the Cedar Brakes which I would never see again?

After a time word began to trickle into the penitentiary about their rumored activities. Doolin was still on the warpath. This and that holdup was being ascribed to him and the new bunch he was running with. Also Doolin had taken unto himself a wife. Marriage is a dubious blessing for the outlaw. By marriage he had acquired a brother-in-law. He had made himself, as it turned out, more vulnerable.

Bill Tilghman, the redoubtable sheriff, had taken his trail. So also had Heck Thomas. For a space the deadly game of hide and seek was on. These things we knew in Lansing. There were several hundred Oklahomans among the prisoners, housed in the Kansas Penitentiary until Oklahoma got around to building its own prison. Among these men the lawless doings of their home territory ran in a subterranean current of rumor,

gossip, news. How long, we speculated, would Doolin last?

The fight at Ingalls, in Payne county, Oklahoma, was the beginning of the end. Ingalls is one of the red periods in Border shooting history.

Doolin, Pierce and Newcomb had formed the nucleus of a new gang.

Bill Dalton had also joined the outfit—the last of our brotherhood destined for violent life and violent death. Bill had never ridden with us. We wouldn't let him. He had come back from California with his wife and two children. The death of his brothers at Coffeyville and my imprisonment had not served to halt his plunge into outlawry.

These four, then—Doolin, Bill Dalton, Pierce and Newcomb—and an innocent bystander who became involved in the shooting, were in the Ingalls battle with five officers. Sheriff John Hixon had gotten wind of their whereabouts. Hixon and his son, together with deputy marshalls A. H. Houston, Dick Speed and Lafe Shadley entered the little prairie town on the Cimarron in the disguising shelter of a covered wagon. It was about noon. They saw the outlaws' horses tied in front of a livery stable, across the street from the little barroom lodging house. Doolin, Bill Dalton, Pierce and Newcomb were in the bar having a sociable glass. Half a dozen cowboys and farmers also lounged about. Upstairs in a room, sick, lay Arkansas Tom, a cowpuncher. He knew the boys but maintained that he had no definite connection with the gang.

It was from Arkansas Tom, convicted after the fight, that I heard the details of the battle. I fitted him with stripes at Lansing.

From the shelter of the covered wagon the five officers opened the fight with a surprise volley. They fired into the saloon. The bystanders ducked for safety. The outlaw quartette pumped a hot return fire at Sheriff Hixon and posse. Within a few minutes three of the marshals lay dead, Houston, Speed and Shadley. Sheriff Hixon and his son managed to slip away under fire and did not return. They were not wounded. None of the outlaws received a scratch. Arkansas Tom later told me in prison that he didn't fire a shot. He said he had no gun, and none was found on him.

After the four outlaws had reached their horses and had got away, Arkansas Tom permitted himself to be taken by other possemen who had now arrived. Unable to substantiate his non-participation in the deadly fray, he was sentenced to fifty years. He served about ten.

Not long after the Ingalls fight, Doolin went to Eureka Springs, Ark., to take the medicinal baths. Rheumatism was beginning to warp him badly. His brother-in-law is said to have tipped off Doolin's whereabouts to Bill Tilghman. The intrepid deputy U. S. marshal went after the outlaw alone. Doolin was in no condition to put up a fight when Tilghman took him by surprise. Shortly after he had been landed in the Guthrie jail, Doolin managed to get a six-shooter. He escaped and took a number of prisoners with him.

Again one of those shifts which so often split and rearranged the old Border outlaw organizations took place. Bill Dalton retired to throw in with another bunch. Together with Jim Wallace and Tom and Jim Knight, he drifted down into Texas. There they ran into fresh trouble.

Pierce and Doolin had gone to their deaths as I have already related, on the Dunn farm.

Doolin, operating once more with new associates, raided a bank in Southwest City, Missouri. About this affair Bee Dunn was presumed to have had some knowledge. The information got to the ears of Heck Thomas. Immediately Thomas began setting the stage for the final act in Doolin's lurid life. He planted a posse in a timber draw near a ranchhouse one night. He seemed to know precisely when and where Doolin was to appear. In fact the outlaw was already in the house when Thomas deployed his possemen.

It was dark when Doolin stepped out of the house and started for his horse down in the draw. Straight toward the ambush he strode, rifle in hand. Heck Thomas saw him coming, a familiar bulking figure in the starlight, his head craning this way and that in creature caution. The officer gave a silent signal.

Several shots flashed from the dusky brush. With his final spasm Doolin whirled up his gun. But he toppled dead before he could fire.

Heck Thomas described the affair to me after I got out of prison. He was then chief of police at Lawton.

"Before Doolin came out of the cabin," said Thomas, "Bee Dunn had slipped around to where I waited. I pulled down on Doolin and yelled to him to throw 'em up. And at that instant, as Doolin jerked around in surprise, Bee Dunn, standing close beside me, let go a load of buckshot. He claimed the gun went off accidentally. Several rifles cracked at almost the same time, but it was the buckshot which ended Bill Doolin's career." This was also the version of Matthews, Doolin's brother-in-law.

Marshal Thomas, however, took official credit for killing Doolin. Some years later Bee Dunn was in turn killed in a street encounter with U. S. Marshal Frank Canton at Pawnee, Oklahoma.

Much of the information about the deaths of Doolin, Newcomb, Pierce and Bee Dunn was given me by my friends Major Gordon W. Lillie (Pawnee Bill), and Colonel Joe Miller of the 101 Ranch. These two old-timers have known many noted Oklahoma outlaws and peace officers during the past forty years.

Bill Dalton followed the footsteps of his ill-fated brothers.

In 1894 he was accused of bank robbery at Longview, Texas. U. S. deputy marshals located him at Ardmore in the Indian Territory. Together with his wife and two children, whom he had brought from California, he was stopping at the ranch of Houston Wallace.

On a bright June morning Bill's wife and Mrs. Wallace had driven to Ardmore to do some trading. Bill and his two youngsters, and a sixteen-year-old farm hand employed by Wallace remained at the ranch. Bill helped the boy with the work for an hour or two. They came in and had their noon-day dinner. The youth went out to the corral to hitch up his team.

Bill Dalton delayed a few minutes to play with his youngest child, Grace. She was a cripple. For a space Bill's mind was far from the things suggested by the Winchester rifle which stood propped against the porch a few yards distant.

A sudden reverberating crash of guns stilled the childish laughter.

Only one bullet had hit Bill. It had entered low in the back, above the kidney, and had come out above the heart. The death wound would have been impossible, had Bill been erect and running as the deputies later alleged. The bullet would have gone straight through his body, not at a decidedly upward tangent. The fact is, Bill Dalton was shot while seated in a chair, bending over, presumably toward the child seated at his feet. He hadn't had a chance for his life.

The deputies came in for considerable public censure, and one by one they were discharged and drifted to other parts.

THE REPORTS of Doolin's cashing in, and of Bill Dalton's death as they reached me at Lansing, seemed an incredible echo of my own forays. Already my hectic yesterdays had retreated into the remote past. Now that I was out of it, now that the blinders had fallen from my eyes, these final rampagings by those who had been so close to me by ties of blood and stirrup companionship struck me as acts beyond all reason. Damned fools they had been—literally. As I had been. As all of us are who, once singed or forewarned, run back into the fire like bewildered, intractable animals. Ran back to die—or to sit huddled in a cell.

I managed to weather my celled years without a black mark to hamper my

eventual liberation. I had been the first life termer in Lansing to be assigned to tasks outside the prison wall as trusty. That dispensation had served as a test of my tractability. I had learned to stand hitched.

In 1907 I was pardoned by Governor E. W. Hoch, after having served fourteen and a half years. In restoring me to full citizenship, Governor Hoch had the courage to follow his own convictions, although my liberation was not challenged; not even by the citizens of Coffeyville. But that fact in nowise mitigated the fine humanitarian initiative of the man who freed me, and for whom I have unutterable gratitude.

I had paid the penalty, what time the law exacted. I was never apologetic for having served time in a penitentiary. Some of the most intelligent and honorable men I have ever met were my cell neighbors. I did not come shuffling out with a cringing air of abasement. And in all my subsequent business associations and wide travels I can recall no single person who ever voluntarily referred to my trouble or my incarceration. The pride which once had been salved by outlaw deed also helped restore me. A man can keep the prison pallor off his soul.

Into the strange effulgence of restored liberty I stepped like a blinking owl. My old world was gone. How irrevocably gone, I did not realize until the gates of Lansing opened. In prison my mind had been too preoccupied to dwell much upon the fact that I was sole survivor of an exterminated clan.

Here was the land, the haunts I had known. But my old buddies walked it no more—men with whom I had gone through hell and high adventure. Wheat rolled yellow, oil gushed from the earth and cotton fields stood white where so many of our secret paths had run.

Vanished was the virgin wild along the Cimarron, the Canadian and the Red Rivers where we roughshod young riders had galloped and marauded. Some of the cowboys, shamefaced, were beginning to guide plows. A few of them actually fell so low as to milk a cow! The old-time "bad man," too, was getting mighty lonely and hard up for excitement; he was considered a plain nuisance. The heyday of the riding man had waned; the breed was becoming decadent. The last untrammeled border had passed into history.

Like me, the Western land had been tamed to the lockstep of ordered prosperity.

Julia Johnson and I were married a year later in the little town of Bartlesville, the place through which she had sped one night to save me from ambuscade, the place where we had ridden and romped in careless youth. We moved to California. I became a building contractor.

Occasionally some of the old-timers, the last stragglers of Border days, find the paved trail to our modest home. Aging men they are, sedate, coming in motors with their good wives and children; ex-officers who once hunted me, or one-time desperadoes who somehow managed to cheat Boot Hill by the skin of their teeth.

Can these benign and circumspect old codgers be they who were once so tough and reckless? Those the men who were once so hot spurred?

While we muse on phantoms of dangerously bright days, like spent horses in a pasture, the violent young colts of another generation fight the snubbing post and paw the air. Outlaw fashions change, but lawlessness runs on forever: by turn rampant, atoned and subdued, in endless cycles.

THE END

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

MORE about the eating habits of buzzards and condors. Comrade Charles H. Coe scouts the idea that any of them ever make their own kill.

Washington, D. C.

I have been interested in Camp-fire items relating to the eating habits of the buzzards and condors. I lived many years in southeastern Florida, going there in 1873. In all that region the turkey buzzard (*Catharista aura*) and the black vulture (*Catharista atrata*) are very common. I spent the last ten winters at Miami, and have been through the Everglades repeatedly, from east to west and as far south as Cape Sable.

During my residence and sojourns in the State I have been a keen student of Nature, also an enthusiastic hunter and boatman. Articles embracing my observations afield and afloat have appeared in many Northern publications, some of which articles have been devoted to the wonderful flight of the turkey buzzard, in which I have been particularly interested.

NEVER have I ever seen, myself, nor heard of the above two buzzards eating anything except carrion, and I strongly doubt if any one ever saw them kill their own food. In the first place, they are true scavengers and lack the strong, sharp and curved talons of the hawks and eagles, which enable these rapacious birds to clutch and hold their prey. Therefore, they never pursue other birds in the air, and when on the ground their extremely slow and awkward movements prevent their catching even the smallest bird or animal.

They never molest a dead animal until decay has softened the hide, thus making it possible for them to tear it and commence their feast. Sometimes a venturesome and greedy individual will gouge out the eyes in advance of the regular repast, but the crowd are content to wait.

THESE birds, like the true condor of the Andes, go for long periods without eating, a wise provision of Nature that foresees the irregularity of carrion finds. This explains why the buzzard can wait for his carrion, his natural food, and why it is unnecessary for him to go out of his way to catch and kill it.

The turkey buzzards are gifted with a powerful and sustained flight, due to the fact that they expend little energy or effort when on the wing. They are true gliders or sailors of the air, and it never is necessary for them to flap their wings when once well above the treetops. Their wings are held at the proper angle for going in any direction—even, slowly, directly into the wind; which a boat sailor can not do, with his perpendicular sails.

THIS peculiar power and flight of the bird, with the expenditure of little effort and energy, coupled with their often forced abstemious habit, enables the turkey buzzard to cover vast distances. In fact, on days when the wind is fresh, this sailor of the air seems to soar—often so high in the air that it is a mere speck against the clouds—for the love of it.

The black vulture can not compare favorably with the other when on the wing, as it is obliged to flap its wings more or less. This peculiarity marks the bird—this and its darker color and the absence of the red head. It is not as common as the turkey buzzard, with whom it is not on a strictly social equality, although its habits are very nearly the same.

I NOTE what Mr. Trébor says he saw in the B. W. Islands, and am sure he must have been mistaken in the bird. A buzzard could not hold a "chicken in its beak" and eat it! Neither could it hold anything in its claws while eating it. Nor does it "hop."

Mr. Trébor quotes Dr. Wm. Beebe as saying that "buzzards do not eat carrion by choice but because it's the easiest food to procure." As a matter of fact, carrion is a buzzard's natural food as absolutely as milk is a baby's. A buzzard's sense of smell is only slightly developed, which is another of Dame Nature's wise provisions. —CHARLES H. COE

GRACE ISABEL COLBRON, Ask Adventure expert covering "Denmark," tells us of a hardy sailor family from that land. I'm sure the members of Camp-fire will be glad to hear of some of Captain Andersen's interesting experiences.

New Canaan, Conn.

Camp-fire readers might be interested in the recent adventures of Knud Andersen, Danish sailor-novelist, who crossed the Atlantic in a former fishing-cutter, sixty feet on the water-line. Men have gone to sea in smaller boats, but no man, at least not since the days of small sailing craft that lived on the high seas, has had the temerity to take with him his wife and young children. Also, not many women would have the courage and spirit of adventure to break up a comfortable home on shore and settle down for a year or so on the ocean.

I vote therefore that both Skipper Andersen and Mrs. Helga Andersen be made honorary members of the Inner Circle of the Camp-fire.

At the moment of writing these lines *Monsunen* (*The Monsoon*), the Andersen ocean home, is moored at a dock foot of East 28th St., East River.

The family moved aboard *Monsunen* in June, 1928. September of that year, the sturdy little ketch left home waters for her great adventure. To England, then South, buffeted cruelly in the Bay of Biscay, but showing sailing qualities that won her skipper's heart entirely, *Monsunen* touched at a few ports—Madeira, Canary Islands, Cape Verde. Then across the South Atlantic to Rio, southward still to Buenos Aires, back across the South Atlantic . . . the best sailing ground in the world, Capt. Andersen says . . . touching at Tristan da Cunha, to Cape Town. Up to Donkergat Whaling Station to revive some old memories of his "fore-the-mast" days, then Ascencion, St. Helena, back across the Atlantic to Barbados. Now New York, just a stage in the journey.

OUTBOARD, *Monsunen* shows the marks of wind and weather. Her unusually sturdy spars reveal possibilities of sailpress that has driven her along at twelve miles an hour several times. Inboards, her comfortable cabin boasts a piano, well filled bookshelves, good pictures on the wall, all the things that go to make a home and betray the presence of a cultured woman. The crew: three Danish sailors, a cook of mixed ancestry with a French name, and a young Swiss steward, all of them lads under 26, are serving without pay for the joy of the adventure. And a joyous set they are, "the best sailors on the Atlantic," Capt. Andersen insists. There are three even more enthusiastic adventurers aboard who insist on being rated as of the crew: Lis, just twelve (who says a girl can be as good a sailor as any boy, and has proved it), Jan, aged 8, and little Ture, just four. The two eldest stand their watch, and Ture helps wherever an extra man is needed.

The Monsoon has proved her worth in many a thrilling moment, both in northern and southern waters. Captain Andersen has gathered valuable experience as to the sailing qualities of the deep-sea-fisher type of boat. His plans now are to go home across the north Atlantic in the face of autumn storms to spend the winter months ashore, writing.

Then off again in the spring, wherever the spirit listeth.

He should have some interesting things to tell *Adventure's* readers.

—GRACE ISABEL COLBRON

ANYBODY know the words of Zamboanga, marching song of the Twenty-Seventh U. S. Infantry? This reader wrote Major Wheeler-Nicholson, who in turn sends on the request to you.

Auburn, New York

In your story "The Song of Death" which appeared in the December 15th, 1929, issue of *Adventure*, you told of two songs, "The Song of Dimitri Karsloff" and "The Song of the Thirsty Lances." I should like to know if these songs are purely imaginary or are there really such songs? If so, I should like to obtain them both. Could you tell me where I could obtain them?

And by the way, could you tell me where I could secure a copy of "Zamboanga," which you mentioned in several of your stories? Are there words to it? —JOSEPH SHIELDS

Major Wheeler-Nicholson's reply:

Bridgehampton, Long Island

The songs to which you refer "The Song of Dimitri Karsloff," and "The Song of the Thirsty Lances" are partly imaginary in that so far as I know, no such songs exist. The first named, however, "The Song of Dimitri Karsloff" I based on a story said to be an historical fact. The incident to which it refers, about the officer who threw his sweetheart to the wolves that he might press on and carry word of his comrades' plight, is said to have taken place at the time Charles XII of Sweden was attacking the forces of Peter The Great of Russia.

"The Song of the Thirsty Lances" is also based on an incident in ancient Muscovite history, when the Voivode Ploskina treacherously slew or was slain by the "Veliki Kniaz" or Great Prince Matisslaff of Kiev. Upon this historical foundation I put these songs into the mouths of my characters.

AS TO the song, "Zamboanga," I can remember at this late date but very few of the words of that song, which is written in Spanish and was composed by a Spanish officer who had to sail away from Zamboanga, leaving behind a beautiful mestizo sweetheart, when the United States accepted the surrender of the Spanish garrison The song was later adopted by the 27th United States Infantry, which used it as a regimental marching song and played it in the crowded streets of Vladivostok, in Cossack *stanitzas* along the Ussuri River and in the muddy streets of garrison towns along the Amur.

In the hope that some reader of *Adventure* may recall the Spanish words I am sending a query to the editor. —MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

QUOTING from a letter by Victor Shaw. He informs us that hunters and anglers up north are becoming air-minded; and for enthusiastic Eastern sportsmen, he outlines an Alaskan trip requiring less than two weeks!

Loring, Alaska

You know we've been using planes commercially up here for a long while (had the edge on you folks in the States, I think, on freight transportation, etc.), but I think it'll be news to you to learn that we go hunting and fishing here right along by plane, as well as flip into town and back and thumb our noses at gasboats. However, at least two adventurers know the latter fact in Boston, my old home town. Listen:

L. M. Lombard, lawyer, 35, and F. N. Blodgett, banker, 28, flew a Gypsy Moth with a 100 h. p. mill, from the Hub to Seattle, last month and then up to Ketchikan. From here, they took off for Admiralty Island and hunted four days. They saw 16 bear, lots of deer, wolves, etc., and more salmon and trout than they believed swam in water; spent two of the four days taking moving picture shots at brownies catching salmon and other peaceful pursuits, then got out their rifles and secured a silvertip and a brownie for trophies.

THE grizzly was downed with a .405 soft-nose ball, that tore a hole through his heart big as your fist, but the bear covered 200 yards before he dropped. The brownie was shot seven times with that .405 as well as with an Army Winchester. It was down in a deep cañon where the boys jumped it, and kept coming on at them while the seven bullets were slamming into it until it became too heavy to travel and gave it up.

The boys got within 40-50 feet of the bears they photoed, and incidentally they explode the theory that bears swipe salmon out of streams and eat 'em on the bank. They swat 'em quick and hold 'em down tight and take a bite Sometimes they leap on 'em with both front swipers like a cat. Nary a "scoop", and they've got the proof with moving pictures. Another old wives' tale gone blooey.

Now, whadya know about that? Some little hunting trip, eh what? Just flip off in New York, skip 5000 miles by air, hunt your bear or get your deer, or goat, or moose, and flip back again before your two weeks' limit is up! These birds go back via Frisco, just to fly the Columbia Gorge, Crater Lake, etc. It doesn't cost any more, either. They were equipped with pontoons for our water country, and change to wheels for the States To quote Mr Blodgett: "Where else can you see and do what we've done in four days? This country is a game paradise."

And oh Lord! That's just what I've been telling AA for 10 years, but I missed out on telling 'em to come by air. —VICTOR SHAW

NO ONE who is at all familiar with Bill Adams and his writings is going to be much in doubt as to the identity of *Jim Dennison*, the first voyage apprentice lad in his story "Eat, Drink, and Be Merry," this issue. The appended note by the author is something in the nature of a confession, though not too contrite. Which is as it should be, for some of us, at least, haven't yet reached the point where we demand practicality of the poet. And Mr. Adams is a poet—even in his prose.

Dutch Flat, Cal.

It may interest you to know that Jim Dennison is still alive. Whether he has any more sense than he had as a first voyage kid I don't just know. He is rather bald on top of his head, and somewhat gray round the temples. Letting tomorrow take care of itself is still something of a habit with him. No doubt he is something of what a sensible business man would call a "sucker". But he seems to get as much fun out of life as most people get. Simple pleasures suit him, satisfy him well. He still dreams of the sea, of canvas arching to a bully breeze. Had he his life to live over he would go to sea again, just as he did those many years ago. Nothing would give him greater pleasure than to meet up with Chink, Andy, Mike, the second mate, and the foremast hands with whom he traded away his good sea clothing for scant whacks of hard ship fare.

He well remembers the day when, on arriving home, he opened the lid of his sea chest, and how his aunt looked when she saw within it nothing but a moldering porpoise head.

"Why, Jim," she cried, "where are all your clothes?"

And Jim replied with the old, old story with which many and many a kid just back from his first voyage answered such a question.

"We'd a terrible blow in the Western Ocean," said he. "Almost every one aboard had all their things swept over the side. It was a wonder the ship didn't go down!"

"I NEVER met an apprentice who wasn't a damned young liar," said the second mate.

The second mate spoke truth. But the lies of a sea apprentice were usually harmless unintended lies, for all that; and the second mate's "damned" was not meant too seriously. Jim Dennison knew very well that if she had had the least idea of what a hard life the sea was, if she had had the vaguest notion of the sort of fare that he lived on, it would have been terrible woe to his old aunt. By a bit of a lie he saved her feelings. And in later years, when he was a hardcase second mate himself, drawing a meager wage, he'd send her a good share of his hard earned dollars. Then he'd stroll forward and enter the half-deck where a gang of young apprentices sat.

"What in the devil did you young fools ever come to sea for?" he'd ask, as he filled his big pipe with the eldest apprentices' 'baccy.

"God knows, sir," the eldest apprentice would answer.

"He does, eh? Ye think He does do ye?" Jim would ask, and he'd thoughtfully add, "God knows, and He won't tell any one."

TODAY Jim Dennison knows why a lad was such a young ass as to go to sea. "It was a hard life—but it was a man's life," Jim Dennison mutters to himself.

And in his snug bed, while winds roar round his chimney and the snow whirls by in the dark, he dreams every once in a while that he is picking up a topsail in a Western Ocean gale; or he dreams that he is sitting on the rail watching a tropic sunset, or a moonbow in the sea mist far off shore Or he dreams that he is a first voyage kid at the wheel again, fingers frozen, feet frozen, holding a hard running ship to her course. And when he wakes in the morning, to see the bare trees shaking in the wind and the big flakes flying, he says as he pulls on his socks, "Lord, I wish the old days were back, and that I was a kid again."

And that's just about how it is today with many an old sailing ship man. —BILL ADAMS

AND speaking of poets, here's a bit of informal verse sent in with one of Harry Kemp's manuscripts. Of course it was never meant to be publicized in printer's ink. But then, we editors aren't favored every day with a personal poem—not even with a thoroughly non-eulogistic poem as this is:

POEM

The gentlemen of Adventure
Sit in their places and frown
Sometimes, I fear, when a poet
Sends a bottle of good wine down.
But when they make him revise a
Poem that they have bought,
He's got to drink a bottle or so
Of wine, to wake his thought!
He's got to drink a bottle or so
To wake his inspiration.
Exacting editors are oft
Unto the bard—damnation!

—HARRY KEMP

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

The Pampas

NOT the best place for an American to seek a pleasant and well paying job.

Request:—"What would be the chances of working on a ranch on the *pampas* of South America?"
—CHARLES M. BRETT, Jamaica, Long Island

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—In South America the great plains are called by different names in various parts of the continent. In the north, in Colombia and Venezuela, they are called the *llanos* (yanos) and the people dwelling on them are called *llaneros.* In these portions the wooded areas are called *selvas.* In other portions open areas are called *el campo.* Then we have the *savannas,* or open grassy areas surrounded by woods. Also in Chile the *pampa* has the meaning of any sort of country. This is used by foreigners in the nitrate fields in the Atacama Desert.

But the real *pampa,* and it is most always used in the singular down there, is the great sea of grass (bunch) extending from the wooded area of the south temperate zone which runs in a zig-zag line across Brazil to the Andes in Bolivia. It covers hundreds of thousand of square miles, rolling in Brazil and a portion of Uruguay and Paraguay, but sloping down to flat country having but four inches of slope to the mile in northern Argentine and then ending in southern Argentine in rugged country cut to pieces by cañons and broken hills.

The northern portion of the great plains is warm, hot. The southern portion is bleak and cold.

Cattle, ostriches, various Indians, predatory animals, roam the *pampa* here and there, and the squatters who live on and by the *pampa* are known as *gauchos*. This is a generic name meaning dwellers on the *pampa* and not "cowboy" as is the common understanding up here. Most of the male *gauchos* are able to herd cattle, horses, ostriches, but the name is not a synonym for "cowpuncher," "tophand" or "*vaquero*." The word is possibly Moorish and was brought to the *pampa* by Spaniards and Moors just after the conquest. The Spaniards had just been freed from the Moorish yoke and much of the customs and equipment, especially riding gear and type of architecture, was Moorish in design. These Spaniards and Moors who took to the *pampa* mated with Indian squaws, made their clothing out of skins in a mixture of Tehuelche Indian and Moor design, and started a sort of different race of people upon the earth.

Within the past couple or three decades huge ranches have sprouted up here and there upon the *pampa*, owned by rich *gauchos*, by native cattle kings, and here and there by foreigners, such as Americans, Jews, English, and Germans or other Europeans. Much of the work on these ranches is done by *gauchos*, especially certain portions of it, such as horse breaking, cattle branding, driving, etc. Polish ranch hands, Spaniards from the hills of Spain, West Indian negroes, and others are also found working on the big ranches.

THE opportunities for work on the ranches for an American depend on many things. The wages are not enticing, except for positions as foreman, etc. Here and there an American will be found working the better positions and there are a few who are just plain riders along with the natives. The large packing houses also have many Americans among their employees, usually holding positions where they are in charge of a few natives.

There are so many better paying positions in South America for an American that I would hesitate to suggest ranch work in preference to positions where one may earn eight or ten times as much per month with much less work and hardship. However, if you still have a yen for ranch work about the only way to do would be to go down there and travel about a bit and then find some big outfit that would be willing to put you on.

Asbestos

THE multiplying uses of this curious mineral have aroused the prospector's interest.

Request:—"In what formation is asbestos found? Is it mostly in pockets or vein? This is in California."—ROBT. A. SMITH, Eden, California.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Asbestos is a fibrous variety of amphibole, and includes a fibrous serpentine which is called chrysotile.

It is found in several varieties of rock such as limestone, some schists, and also peridotite.

The California asbestos is found in an altered peridotite and occurs in disseminated veins.

This asbestos is mostly in lens or pocket formation in veins. It is mined by glory holes, or opened by tunnels, or obtained in open cuts on surface. The output has not been very large in California. The most of our domestic asbestos comes from Arizona. Asbestos sells at from $75 to as high as several hundred dollars a ton f. o. b. mines, but for the past three years the price has averaged around $115 the ton. The U. S. A. production has been small, Canada and Africa producing large amounts. Canada has been producing about two-thirds of the world tonnage, at about one-half the total value of the world production.

Taxidermy

MAKING the ears look life-like.

Request:—"1. Should tin, lead, and paper ear forms for deer be coated with glue before they are inserted in ear?

2. If deer scalp is pickled in salt and alum is the scalp likely to shrink?

3. Is it advisable to spray all mounted birds and animals with corrosive sublimate? Will this protect against moths indefinitely?

4. Should the ears of rabbit, squirrel and other small animals be skinned out?

5. Should the skin of birds be filled out after the body is in and the legs wired? If so what material should be used?

6. Is it advisable to coat the feet of birds with varnish?

7. If a deer head and neck are modeled in plaster should the head be coated with glue? Or can the scalp be put on without danger of the plaster drying the scalp and causing it to crack?

8. Do you know of any book that would teach me to paint background for birds? Or any book for the amateur artist?

—H. E. COWPER, Duluth, Minnesota

Reply, by Mr. Seth W. Bullock:—1. Artificial ears for deer should not be coated with glue before inserting.

2. The pickle bath for deer scalps will not shrink them appreciably if they have been properly prepared beforehand by thinning down sufficiently.

3. Yes, a spraying with corrosive sublimate after the specimen has been sprayed with gasoline and dried out is a preventative against insects. Do so twice a year.

4. For ears of animals smaller than the squirrel it is not necessary to skin out. Those of the squirrel and larger it is better to unless some precaution is taken to prevent them from shriveling.

5. Cotton should be used to fill out the skins of birds after mounting as the parts require.

6. Shellac is preferable to varnish due to its transparence and lack of color. (White shellac.)

7. Never coat a deer head or any other with glue before putting on the scalp, regardless of with what material they are modeled. The scalp will not crack if prepared properly.

8. Rowley's "Taxidermy and Museum Exhibition" will help you with backgrounds.

Spanish Stamp

MR. DAVIS comments on the Goya set, which aroused considerable interest last summer.

Spain issued a new set of stamps on June 8th commemorating the works of Francisco Goya, one of her famous painters and engravers. Goya is much better known by his etchings than his oils. Recognition seems to have come rather late, no doubt on account of his manner of living. As a man he was bold, capricious, headstrong and obstinate. He was a good musician and gifted with a voice. His travels and hilarity seems to have delayed his art work, for his life seems to have been anything but that of a quiet, orderly citizen. He was commissioned by the king to design a series of frescoes for the church of St. Anthony. No doubt Spain commemorates his works, rather than his life by this issue of a series of stamps consisting of 32 varieties, 18 of which are for ordinary postage and 14 for air mail use. The designs are pleasing and well executed, showing portraits of Goya and reproductions of some of his more famous paintings. Every lover of beautiful stamps will want to add this set to his or her collection. Edward Navarro of Madrid sends samples to chronicle. —H. A. DAVIS

Coastal Cruise

TWO men could easily sail a forty-footer from New York to California by way of the Panama Canal.

Request:—"I should like to ask you a few questions concerning small boats, that is if a boat forty feet or perhaps thirty-five feet is termed a small boat.

1. Would it be possible to sail such a boat (with auxiliary engine) around the coast from say Long Island to San Francisco?

2. Could I pick up such a boat second-hand for $1500? If so, where would you advise me to buy it?

3. Is ocean air as good for weak lungs as mountain air? Not that mine are weak, but there would be another fellow.

4. Could two men handle such a boat?

5. What would be a safe boat—in length I mean.

6. Does the idea of sailing around the coast and putting in to whatever harbor you wished and staying awhile sound plausible to you?"—GEORGE H. KNOWLES, Bolton Landing, New York.

Reply, by Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg:—1. It would be possible to sail a boat of the type which you mention around the coast from Long Island to San Francisco, should you go through the canal and not around the lower part of South America.

2. A boat such as you describe could very easily be bought second-hand for the sum of $1,500 and often much less. Many of the nautical magazines advertise under their "classified" columns such bargains, and I'm sure that same could be very easily found around New York City or Brooklyn. However, if not, they can be had in this locality.

3. Ocean air is *not* as good for lung trouble of any kind as mountain air.

4. Two men could very easily handle such a boat on such a proposed trip.

5. Your plans of size as stated in your letter are very good and would be quite suitable were I to pass my own opinion on same.

6. Your plan of sailing around the coast and putting in wherever you feel like, etc., would appeal to me very much had I the time to spare to such a trip, and is very plausible. Many others are doing it and there is no reason why you can not, provided you have the boat, wherewithal and means.

Running

POINTERS for a young man on a cross-country team.

Request:—I am returning to another cross-country season.

I am 18; 5 ft. 10 in.; weight 140 lbs. I have been running long distances since fourteen.

1. Could you give me some advice as to what to eat or drink or do on a morning on which I am scheduled to run?

2. Could you tell me the foods that would help me in my sport?

3. Could you tell me of any sport that might hurt my running?

4. Is running barefoot on the beach bad for the feet?"—ALFRED PERAZI, Brooklyn, New York.

Reply, by Mr. Jackson Scholz:—My first advice would be not to overdo your training at this stage of your development. I mean by that, do not train until you are utterly fatigued. You are still a bit young for distance work, and you will have a much more promising future if you take it easy now.

I believe you may be able to develop speed by working part of the time at shorter distances, such as the quarter and the half mile.

1. For distance running I would suggest a fairly heavy meal about two and a half hours before a race. Eat something easily disgested. Steak and toast is always good.

2. Diet is not important so long as you confine yourself to good wholesome foods and have your meals at regular times. The main idea is to keep your stomach in good condition.

3. I am sorry to say that there is practically no sport which will mix well with running. Golf is bene-

ficial, but most other sports have the tendency to develop the wrong muscles in the legs. In your case, however, I would indulge in any sport I wished. Don't confine yourself entirely to running until you are older. Develop the rest of your body in proportion to your legs.

4. I cannot see how running barefoot on the sand would hurt you. As a matter of fact I should imaging that it would strengthen your feet if you didn't overdo it.

Marines

A MILITARY chess game—a hypothetical war with a Pacific power—in which the Marines hold the island bases while the Navy moves on.

Request:—"Are the Marines always fully equipped and ready to move in a few hours' notice? How soon could all the Marines in the United States be moved to California in case of War with a Pacific power? How many Marines and regular Army men could be on the California Coast in three days' time?"

—ALTON EVANS, Crane, Texas

Reply, by Capt. F. W. Hopkins:—All Marine garrisons are ready on short notice to furnish a quota of men for an expedition. Speaking of the Pacific Coast, the order would go out to concentrate at the expeditionary base at San Diego. Marine Barracks at Mare Island, Cal., Puget Sound, Wash., and smaller detachments, would all furnish a share—they would send a portion of their garrison by train to San Diego on 24 hours' notice. The expeditionary force, always maintained at San Diego in skeleton form, would be expanded by these men, by drafts from ships if necessary and by Marines rushed across the continent from the Atlantic if we had a war in the Pacific. It is impossible to state the number that could be concentrated, in a brief time, because it is dependent on the strategic situation, and how many could be spared from other points. I should say, not in excess of 3,000 men. As these men were concentrated and moved off, say 1,500 men to a transport, a week or so apart, the 3rd Regiment and rest of the reserve, would be coming in, organizing and getting ready to be embarked. I can give no figures for the Army at all. Within three days' time, we could not get more than perhaps 800 men in San Diego available for the field. You can not move troop trains very far in three days elapsed time from the receipt of orders to the moment of arrival at San Diego. But the mission of the Marine Corps is not to defend or garrison the Coast.

THE object is to provide an armed military force to accompany and follow up the Navy in seizing an advanced base of position. Your questions are in themselves almost impossible to answer, because the Marine Corps is so scattered in the U. S. at Naval Stations and so on that can not be left entirely unguarded. I have therefore not taken the trouble to ascertain exactly what could be done this month in which you write, because it may not be the same next month—as such a concentration as you mention would not be contemplated. Your questions are asked through a misunderstanding of the mission of the corps, and it is organized to fulfill this mission. I know what is in your mind, however, so let me go ahead and explain how it would work, and then I think your questions will be answered.

The U. S. Marine Corps is a component part of the Navy, just as much as a battleship is. A fleet can bombard a seacoast, it can blockade a seacoast, it can, by shelling, reduce cities and harbors and by landing its sailors it can possibly capture the harbor or base it is attacking. Without trained and equipped land forces, however, it can not hold this place. The fleet must be free to move and not tied down to defending a shore area it has captured or is occupying as a base. It must be absolutely free, with strong bases from which it can operate. Therefore, the Marine Corps is organized, each first line ship carrying about 75 Marines in its complement, with strong expeditionary forces available to accompany and follow up the fleet. Let us take an example and you will see how it works out.

WAR breaks out in the Pacific, with, let us say, Siam. To prevent an invasion of our shores by a powerful Siamese army and navy that is preparing to sail against us, our battlefleet puts to sea, with twelve battleships, two aircraft carriers, twenty cruisers, and many lighter craft. The strategic point in the Pacific, we will say, is the island of Palmyra, which we will imagine has splendid harbors and natural resources. This is all imaginary, of course; Palmyra is about as valuable as a naval base as Crane, Texas, would be. An advance guard of Siamese cruisers and transports has seized the island. Our fleet attacks and captures it, landing 8,000 sailors and 1,000 Marines from the ships to take it over. Two or three days later, as the train vessels, etc., come up, the transport bearing the first contingent of 1,500 Marines from San Diego, arrives. These land, relieving the 1,000 Marines from the ships, who go back to the ships. The 8,000 sailors went back aboard the ships as soon as the island was under control.

In several weeks the second contingent of 1,500 arrives; we now have a force of 3,000 Marines on the island, and the fleet with its sailors, and 1,000 Marines, lying at anchor, getting ready to attack Siam.

The fleet goes out at last, meets the Siamese fleet and defeats it. It then returns to Palmyra, refits after the battle, picks up the 3,000 Marines there, who have been relieved by later arrivals from the States—perhaps including the 3rd Regiment (Ex-reserve)—and sails for the Siamese coast, being followed by transports containing the parts of the U. S. Army who will make the actual invasion.

These forces then attack Siam, the Navy and Marines establish a "beach head" and cover the landing of the U. S. Army of invasion. The ships'

Marines remain with the ships, part of the Marine Expeditionary force remains to guard the "beach head" and part of them reenforce the army of occupation, and the land operations begin.

You see, in this problem, there is plenty for the Navy and Marine Corps to do before our Army can do anything. Such Marines as are enlisted or concentrated after this first expedition would probably join the Army forces and serve as a Marine Brigade attached to the Army of Occupation, separated for the time being from the Navy. The 3rd Regiment (reserve) would probably be in this organization. Suppose our Navy suffered a reverse, then they would fall back on Palmyra and have a safe refuge to refit, because it would have been held in their absence by the Marine garrison there.

IT IS with deep regret that we announce the death of Dr. John D. Long. For several years Dr. Long rendered valuable service to this department as expert on Motor Camping. His friend, Major Charles G. Percival, M. D., a well known veteran of the tourist trails, has already taken charge of the Motor Camping section. His address will appear in the regular list next issue. There have been a few changes recently in the personnel of the staff, but owing to lack of space there has not always been an opportunity of acquainting you with the new members—except by means of their own letters in reply to readers. A brief word of introduction is due Mr. Gerald T. White (Motor Boating); Mr. A. R. Knauer (Yachting); Dr. S. W. Frost (Entomology) and Captain John V. Grombach (Boxing), though you already know Captain Grombach through his letters on Fencing. We hope to have room also for occasional notes on the present activities and interests of many of the old-time *Ask Adventure* men.

There are at present two vacancies in the list:

Ornithology
Europe, Part 4 (Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Poland)

Readers who feel that they are qualified to serve as experts on these subjects are invited to write to the Managing Editor, *Adventure*, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City, stating their qualifications.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE
TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of
ADVENTURE
November 15th

Talbot Mundy

Begins his novel of Jeff Ramsden and Jimgrim,
and a Buddhist monk who tried to become

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